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THE WHITE ROCKS:

or

THE ROBBERS' DEN.

A Tragedy of the Mountains.

BY A. F. HILL,

AUTHOR OF "OUR BOYS," ETC., ETC.

PHILADELPHIA:

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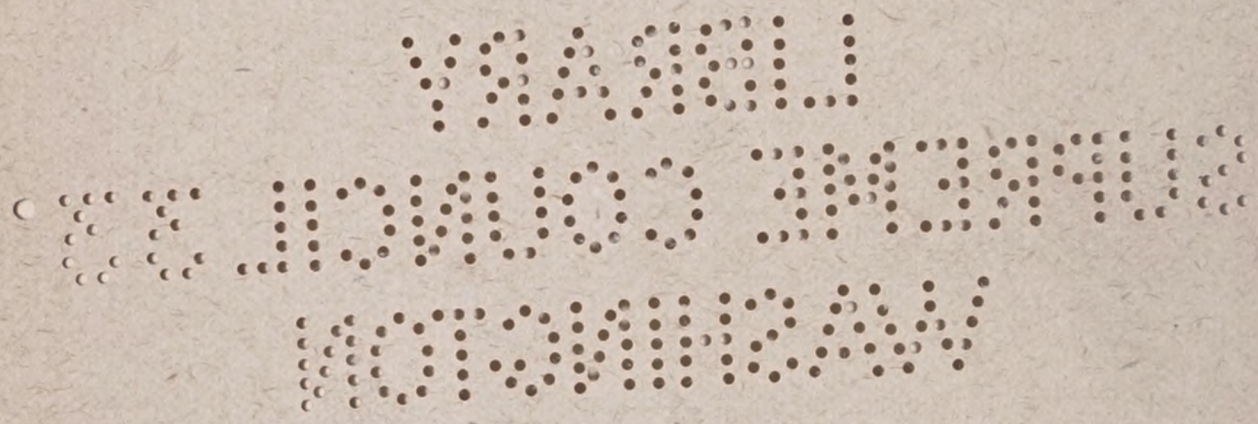

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PREFACE.

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ALTHOUGH this work is simply a narrative of facts which occurred many years ago in the vicinity of the oil lands of Western Pennsylvania, it must not be supposed that I have written it merely to present to the world, for my own advantage, an exciting story. The object which I have in view, beyond all that, is, to set forth a lesson which may prove useful to those fair ones who are prone to regard outward show rather than real worth. If the perusal of this work shall induce the fair reader to reflect seriously on the subject presented, and shall move her to greater vigilance against flattery and deception—if the lesson herein contained shall prove a warning against the perfidy that too often lurks behind the smooth tongue, the handsome face and the portly figure—the chief object for which it was written shall have been accomplished.

I hope, too, that this story may contain a moral by which young men may profit. The manner in which Philip Kirke (who was not naturally more wickedly-inclined, perhaps, than the ordinary run of mortals) went from bad to worse,

and from worse to worst of all, should admonish the young man, when tempted, to "abstain from appearance of evil."

If this were exclusively a work of fiction, I should be far from denying it; but it is not. The facts on which this story is based can be attested by every resident of the section of country where the scenes are laid. Not a few still live in that vicinity who distinctly remember the occurrence at the WHITE ROCKS, and who can relate, substantially, to-day, the story I have presented in these pages. The WHITE ROCKS and Delany's Cave, in the mountain, and the ROBBERS' DEN, on the Monongahela, still remain to speak for themselves.

A. F. HILL.

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THE WHITE ROCKS.

CHAPTER I.

THE WOUNDED FARMER.

It was more than half a century ago. No graceful, swan-like steamboats glided upon the surface of the winding Monongahela, as they do now; railroads were not yet dreamed of; STEAM was regarded as a useless, insignificant thing—merely the ghost of departed water. Traveling, on an extensive scale, was done in those old-time stages, specimens of which may still be seen in remote parts of the country. In localities distant from stage lines, journeys were usually accomplished on horseback, or in those homely vehicles yclept "carryalls." Merchandise was transported across the land by means of heavy, clumsy wagons, while canal-boats and "keel-boats" comprised the chief accommodations in the way of water transportation.

Could the good people of those days have peered through the obscure vail of the future, and could they have been favored with just one moment's glance at the present time; had they caught a glimpse of the steamboat riding upon the smooth river; of the steamer plowing her way across the pathless ocean; or of the noisy locomotive flying across the broad land; they must have imagined themselves suddenly transported to the land of shadows and supernatural things.

They could not have believed that these strange things were merely the toys of their naughty grandchildren.

What a change half a century has wrought! We smile now as we look back only to the time when our grandfathers were young and vigorous men. We smile now at the simplicity of the sages of those times. Wonder if our grandchildren will have equal cause to smile when they look back on these fast times? It may be; but it is difficult to realize that the next fifty years' progress of science can equal the last.

It was a cloudless morning in May. The sun was not up yet; but a glowing and brightening-up of the eastern horizon gave evidence of his speedy appearance. The dew hung heavily upon the green leaves of the bushes and trees that graced the wild shores of the Monongahela.

At this unseemly hour a boat swept around an angle of the river, and came in full view of a tall bluff, from which the stream turned aside a mile below. The course of the river in this intervening mile was straight as an arrow, and was hemmed in by lofty wooded hills on either side. The tall bluff, which turned the course of the stream to the left, was on the Fayette county side, about seventy miles from Pittsburg. It presented an appearance that was not strange in that vicinity; such scenes were not uncommon along the Monongahela. It was very high—at least six or seven hundred feet—almost perpendicular; and though extremely rocky, was covered with bushes, stunted trees and wild vines.

As the boat came in view of this picturesque and apparently lonely scene, one of its crew stood upright, drew forth a white pocket-handkerchief with a flourish which the occasion did not seem to warrant, deliberately wiped the perspiration from his brow, (if, indeed, there was any there,) and, with another flourish, returned it to his pocket. And it is a fact no less worthy of remark, that almost simultaneously a white speck appeared among the green leaves high on the

face of the bluff, fluttered there a moment, then disappeared like a spark. Any one witnessing this would have had no difficulty in making out that it was a signal of some nature, in answer to the pocket-handkerchief affair of the boat. It seemed to be satisfactory, too, for the boat now skimmed the water with increased rapidity, and soon neared the base of the bluff. It did not land on reaching the shore, nor yet turn aside; but, moving straight forward, darted right into the towering hill, and was lost to mortal view. There was at this point, however, a small nook or harbor, running back only thirty or forty feet; and its entrance was so narrow as to be perfectly concealed, except from the closest inspection, by the out-stretching branches of trees which grew upon either side and overhung the water. It was a snug little cove, and answered well the evil purpose for which it was used. We will follow the early navigators into the obscure retreat, and see what manner of work they are engaged in.

On making the boat fast, one of the party put a curiously-contrived whistle to his lips, and uttered a sound so like the cry of the whip-poor-will, that to detect the difference would have required the nicest ear. It was answered by a similar sound from among the foliage, far up the rocky height, and the party in the harbor appeared to await the arrival of some one from above.

While they are waiting let us describe them.

Four persons occupied the boat, which was only an ordinary skiff. The first was a somewhat handsome young man, who could not have been older than twenty-five. He possessed a sprightly figure, which gave evidence of strength as well as vivacity; his features were of good shape, even amounting to symmetry; his hair was long and dark, and his eye was of the blackest. Two others of the party were rough, and even villainous-looking men, of from thirty to forty. The fourth was a man past the prime of life, who lay in a half-reclining position in the boat. His dark hair, which was beginning to be interspersed with gray, was all disordered, tangled and

matted together, here and there, with blood, which flowed from a wound in the head, and trickled over his face. He was in a state of insensibility; his face was very pale, and he frequently uttered deep groans.

Footsteps were frequently heard descending the steep hill, and a stout, muscular, villainous-looking fellow, in a brimless fur cap and short jacket, made his appearance.

"Hilloa, Bill! Coast clear?" said the young man, still sitting in the boat.

"Yes, captain," replied Bill, "it's all right. Didn't ye see my signal?"

"Yes; but we cannot observe too much caution; for, in case——"

"Hilloa!" suddenly ejaculated Bill, interrupting. "What in Satan have ye got there?"

"Why, Bill," replied the young man, "you see things did not turn out quite so favorable as I could have wished."

"How so? You got the cash, I hope?"

"Oh yes, that is all right; but——"

"What!"

"*The old fool recognized me!*"

"Then why didn't ye finish him on the spot?"

"Bill," returned the young man addressed as captain, "how often have I told you that I would never sanction such proceedings, if avoidable?"

"Wery well then, captain," said Bill, with resignation, "I never de-mon-strate when you express your 'tentions."

"Are the Busters up in the cave?" asked the captain.

"Yes; both asleep. They stood guard till two o'clock, and I've been up since, waitin' for you. But how did it happen?"

"I'll tell you in good time; but first lay hold of old Harry—Sam and Joe will help you—and take him up to the cave, if possible."

The wounded man was lifted from the boat in no very tender manner, and Bill, with the aid of Samuel and Joseph,

proceeded to carry the almost inanimate form up the steep acclivity. The way up was winding and tedious; and but for wide steps cut in the rocky hillside, it would have required actual climbing to ascend. The party had ascended to the height of thirty or forty feet, when Bill, who did not seem at all pleased with the state of affairs, impatiently growled out:

"Darn it all! You awk'ard fellers is only in the way! Give me the old feller to myself, and if I don't take him up to the cave in two minutes, my name aint Bill Hardin!"

The others, thereupon, relinquished the whole burden to the redoubtable Bill, who lifted the body to his shoulder, as though it were a small sack of oats, and, with muscular strides, stalked up the rough stairway, and reached the point in question certainly within two minutes, proving conclusively that his cognomen was Hardin, and that his given name was William.

The point attained was a shelf, not more than six feet wide and twice as long, in the side of the hill facing the river, and about four hundred feet above the surface of the water. Here Bill deposited his groaning burden. There was no sign of a cave. The place was hidden from observation by trees, bushes, vines and overhanging foliage.

"Well, what are ye goin' to do with him, captain?" asked Bill, as the remainder of the party came up.

"I scarcely know," replied the captain; "for the present put him in the cave, and see that he does not escape. It will never do for him to disclose what he sees here, in case he should recover. I don't think he can recover, though."

"Well, boys," said Bill, addressing Sam and Joe, the other two villains, "slide him in."

Bill thrust aside some thick vines that covered the rocky walls which rose almost perpendicularly from the shelf to an additional height of two hundred feet, and disclosed a small opening, which was no other than the entrance to a spacious cavern in the hillside. The orifice was only large enough to

admit the person of a man in a recumbent position. Bill entered to receive the wounded man, while Sam and Joe proceeded to discharge the duty of (as Bill expressed it) "sliding" him in. That done, the whole party entered; after which the vines were again carefully adjusted, so as to conceal the entrance; and had any wandering juvenile chanced that way a moment after, clambering among the rugged rocks in quest of birds' nests, he would have been as unconscious and unsuspecting of the presence of those terrible robbers and their den as though he were asleep in his bed in some distant farm-house.

The cavern was about thirty feet in length by fifteen in breadth, while its rough, irregular ceiling of rocks was about twenty-five feet high. The floor, consisting of solid rock, was quite smooth, and almost level, while innumerable fissures and ill-shapen recesses pierced the walls. In one of these recesses, which took an upright position, was established a "fireplace," while a dim ray of light, shining down through a long, narrow aqueduct, showed that there was just a chance for the smoke to escape. Two rough-looking, ill-clad men were lying asleep, on a pallet of straw, in an obscure corner when our party entered.

Such is a brief picture of the "ROBBERS' DEN."

"Now, cap'n," said Bill, when the wounded man had been laid upon some straw near the damp wall, "how was it?"

"I'll tell you. We moved up the river about three miles, landed on the Greene county shore, concealed our boat, and made for the road, which was but half a mile or so distant. It was pretty dark, you know, and we had no path to follow; so we went up the hill, which was neither very high nor very steep, and striking through a thick wood, soon came out on the road. There we waited. It was about ten o'clock then, and I felt sure he had not passed yet. Hour after hour passed, and still he did not come. At last the moon rose, and soon made everything bright. About three o'clock I was just thinking that he must have passed, or taken some

other road, when I heard him coming. I told Sam and Joe to spring from the shade of the fence when he should come up, knock him from his horse, and get the money, while I should post myself six or eight steps ahead to catch the horse. My idea was to tie the horse to the fence near by, so that old Harry could find him when he should recover. But when he reached us, as ill luck would have it, Joe slipped and fell as he rushed into the road; and as I sprang out to seize the bridle-rein, the moon shone full upon my face, and old White called out, 'Phil. Kirk!' just as Sam struck him from his horse. Sam, seeing that he recognized me, struck him several blows with his club before I could stop him, and I fear it is the last of old Harry White."

"What become o' the hoss?" asked Bill.

"He ran away, for I failed to seize the bridle-rein. So, fearing that a party might soon come in search of the rider, I told Sam and Joe to carry him to the boat. They did so, and it would require a sharp detective to track us here."

"You got the tin, of course?" queried Bill.

"Yes," replied the captain, "here it is;" and he produced a canvas bag, a glance at whose exterior was sufficient to convince any rational man that it contained coin or buttons.

"How much, d'ye think?" asked Bill.

"About a thousand, I should say, if it is all gold;" and, turning the contents out on the table, the captain proceeded to ascertain the exact sum in dollars, which proved to be eleven hundred.

"A good night's work! Eh, Cap.?"

"Yes," said the captain of the robbers, abstractedly, glancing uneasily at the form of the suffering victim; "but I wish things had turned out as I intended. I am sorry now, Bill, that you did not go instead of me. Old White don't know you, and if he had seen you it could have made no difference; but me—well, it's done now, and *he must never leave this place.*"

"Not alive, anyhow," suggested Bill.

The young man did not reply. He was, apparently, in deep thought; and there was anxiety—almost remorse—written on his face. A deep groan from the wounded man startled him.

"He's a beginnin' to revive, captain," said Joe, who sat near the wounded man.

The captain arose and approached the sufferer. The latter slowly opened his eyes, and his lips moved.

"Water! Oh give me water!" he groaned.

A tin cup was applied to his lips, from which he eagerly drank. He then gazed wildly around him—stared at the strange faces, at the strange place, at the rough walls, and dark recesses of the cave.

"Where am I?" he exclaimed, wildly.

"Don't be uneasy," Bill mockingly replied, by way of quieting the unfortunate man.

"Where am I? What has happened?" persistently asked the sufferer.

"You're safe, old boy," returned Bill. "Don't git skeered. You got to make this yer home; so, make yerself as uncomfortable as possible. Yer only got yer head cracked a leetle.'

"Bill!" said the captain, reproachfully.

Henry White started on hearing the captain's voice, and bent his eyes upon him.

"Philip Kirke!" he exclaimed. "You here! You! Oh, I thought *that* part only a dream—only a dream! But I see it all now! I've been robbed—murdered! Yes, MURDERED!" he almost screamed. "And by you, Philip Kirke! By YOU! Oh, Mary! Mary! Mary!" And he sank pale and quivering upon his miserable bed.

Philip Kirke had started back on meeting the eye of the honest old man, whose confidence he had betrayed, and whose murderer he was. He now slunk away, and left the cavern. For several hours he remained without, wandering among the rocks that clung to the bluff, once almost falling over the brink of a steep precipice. But a harrowing shadow

followed him, and he could not flee from it. It was conscience. Oh if last night's work could be undone! Robbery is bad enough; but that honest old man must die—then, Philip Kirke, you are a *murderer!*

When he again returned to the cave he was haggard and pale.

"How is he?" he asked, hoarsely.

"Asleep," replied one of the robbers, who had remained in the cave during the past night, and who was now up and watching by the dying man.

"How long has he been sleeping?" asked Kirke, approaching.

"Ever since I've been up."

"Poor old White! it's all up with him," said Kirke.

"Glad of it," said Bill, coming that moment from a distant part of the cave; "glad of it, for dead men tell no——"

"Bill, I tell you I don't want any man's blood on my head, and, least of all, the blood of old Henry White. Had I foreseen this, I never would have gone out to waylay him. I don't mind robbing the man in whose house I have spent many a happy hour—at whose table I have sat time after time—who has extended to me every hospitality, and even confidence; but to murder him for his gold! Oh!—Well, it can't be helped now—it's done!" he said, with energy, and with the air of a man who was struggling with conscience, and just beginning to gain a slight advantage—"it's done now, and, whatever may be the result, I'll not make myself uncomfortable about it."

"You'd be a fool if you did," observed Bill.

"I never meant to murder him," continued Kirke, by way of giving conscience the *coup de grace*, "and if he dies——"

"Which I'll bet my hat he will," put in the unfeeling William.

"——why, I'll consider it but a stroke of ill-fortune, and——"

"That he orter had better luck," interrupted Bill.

"Well, I'm sorry he had n't. "However," said the captain, by way of dismissing, for good and all, the question at issue between himself and conscience, "whatever *is* to be *will* be; so, it was no fault of mine."

"Exactly," agreed Bill. "I knowed you was a sensible feller. So, take a drink, and let's have breakfast, for it's about time, and all's ready."

Bill produced a stone jug, containing what he termed "rye tea;" also a tincup, and the captain of the robbers suddenly placed himself outside about a gill.

"That's the way to keep up your sperrits," said Bill. "First let a few o' them kind o' sperrits go *down*, and up'll come *your 'n*. Ha, ha!" and William Hardin laughed immoderately at his own wit.

The robbers now assembled for breakfast. As they subsisted on the farmers of the neighboring settlements, their larder was always full of every variety of edibles; and as Bill prided himself, and with some propriety, on his ability to superintend systematically the cooking department, they lived well. Whatever was to be found on any farmer's table graced theirs, and that, too, in some profusion.

CHAPTER II.

DEATH IN THE CAVE.

THE robbers were but six in number. Philip Kirke, whom they called captain, had fled from Ohio about two years previously, after killing a man in a duel. In Pittsburg he fell in with a gang of counterfeiters, became one of their number, and passed some months very profitably.

The gang being at length broken up—thanks to the sagacity of a certain well-known detective of that time—most of its members were arrested and punished; but Philip, with four common thieves of the fraternity, escaped. The five ruffians resolved to direct their steps up the Monongahela river, establish an institution of their own, and make frequent descents upon the rural settlements.

Two of these individuals were Sam and Joe, whom we have mentioned; and the remaining two were brothers of the name of Brewster—which name was rendered, by their companions in crime, "Buster;" and, accordingly, they were always spoken of as the "Busters." Their Christian names, if they ever had any, were scarcely known to their companions, and almost forgotten by themselves.

These five promising gentlemen first established their headquarters in an old dilapidated house, about three miles from the present site of Brownsville, which was then but a little village. They had not been there long till it was their fortune to contribute to the general welfare of the people at large, by rescuing a notorious murderer, whose name was William Hardin, from the hands of two constables who had arrested him, as it chanced, near their rendezvous. It occurred in the daytime; and, leaving the two thwarted officials for dead, the whole party fled from that locality, directing their steps still up the river. A few days after they, by mere chance, discovered the cave in the hillside overlooking the river, which they at once adopted as their rendezvous.

A more favorable spot could not well be conceived. There were rich settlements in that locality; but just here the country consisted of wild, rough hills and uncleared land; and there was not a habitation within a mile and a half. The country beyond the river, at this point, partook of the same nature, and it was highly improbable that any human being should, for some years to ensue, discover their retreat.

There was a little village, situated on the right bank of

the Monongahela, about four miles above the robbers' den, known at that time by the name of Weston. Thriving farmers occupied the surrounding country. They lived contented and happy in the midst of "homely joys and destiny obscure." Few of them had ever been beyond the limits of their own native county; and they lived in blissful ignorance of great cities and their innumerable vices. The extent of their traveling was, perhaps, an occasional visit to Weston, for the purpose of selling their produce, or trading it for necessary articles. Some of the more enterprising occasionally took a trip to Pittsburg with a flatboat load of grain, or a drove of cattle or sheep. These were regarded as useful men, inasmuch as they bought up the products of the country at fair prices, shipping them to Pittsburg, and kept money in continual circulation. Among these was Henry White, who was much esteemed for his honesty and enterprise.

For more than a year the good people of Weston and vicinity had been conscious of the presence of a band of thieves. Sheep had been stolen from their fields, horses from their stables, wheat and corn from their granaries, poultry from their farm-yards, hams from their cellars, and even valuables and money from their houses; and not unfrequently had travelers been waylaid, knocked down and robbed. Many were the surmises of the country people as to who the robbers were, whence they had come, and where they held forth. The strangest part of it was, that not one of them had ever been seen. The traveler had *felt* them, and the farmer had missed his property, but no one had ever enjoyed the privilege of gazing upon one of the desperadoes. Some expressed it as their deliberate opinion that the robbers were a species of wild men, who inhabited the fields and woods, or the adjacent mountains; some believed that they were rascals from Pittsburg, who made frequent excursions to the rural districts; while others, taking into consideration their almost constant presence,

argued that they must have a place of rendezvous not far off —most probably in the mountains. It was clear that there was an organized band of marauders somewhere, and that they were very attentive to the people of the vicinity of Weston.

One of the first victims of the robbers was a young man, who occasionally made his appearance at Weston. He was from Pittsburg, and came to the village in the character of a trader; sometimes purchasing grain, and at other times making collections of choice cattle for the markets. He made his head-quarters at the village tavern, to which he returned one evening a little later than usual, with his clothes torn, disordered, and covered with dust, and several bruises on his head and face, among which was a delightful one just below the eye. He stated that about dark, while leisurely returning from a neighboring farmer's, he had suddenly received a blow on the head from a heavy weapon, dealt by an unseen hand; that before he could turn he received another, which sent him stunned and reeling to the earth; that he knew nothing for a short period, and that when he recovered he found his pockets turned inside out, and his money gone. Luckily he had taken but little money with him that morning, and his loss was not great. When we state that the name of this unfortunate (?) young man was Philip Kirke, the reader will readily discern that the whole affair was a well-acted farce.

Frequent robberies occurred after this, and at the time of the commencement of our story, the secret robbers had become a very terror to the people of the settlement.

There was one redeeming trait in their conduct: they never murdered. Many had been knocked down and robbed by the unseen brigands, but none had been killed; sometimes they were not even stunned; but their pockets were rifled in a twinkling, and ere they could spring up and look about them the cunning assailants had vanished.

After such occasions parties sometimes hastily formed, and,

armed with rifles and pistols, went in search of the offenders, but always with the same result—to find no trace of them. Armed parties had frequently searched the adjacent mountains and wild river hills, in the hope of discovering their rendezvous, but in vain.

The marauders had at times extended their depredations to the left shore of the river, but they confined their operations chiefly to the Fayette county side.

All their depredations were attributable to Captain Philip Kirke and his party of five, who inhabited the well-concealed den on the face of the steep river-hill. Kirke frequently visited Weston as a trader; occasionally, indeed, purchasing a small flock of sheep and driving them to Pittsburg, by which he, of course, never lost anything. In the meantime he managed to communicate almost daily with his companions at the den, frequently giving them information to facilitate their operations, and the news generally. Even while staying in the village, he sometimes participated in adventures himself, totally unsuspected by the victims whom he met daily, face to face.

On one occasion, he and a wealthy farmer, with prospects of a speculation, purchased a large lot of cattle, drove them to Pittsburg, and sold them at a good price; but while returning to Weston they were waylaid and robbed of the whole proceeds, much to the sympathy of the people of that locality. It is needless to observe that the robbery had been arranged by Philip Kirke with his friends at the cave.

A week prior to the events narrated in the first chapter, Philip Kirke, while in the village, had met Henry White (with whom he was a great favorite), who confided to him that he was about to visit Pittsburg, to get a sum of money that was due him for a lot of grain that he had sold there; that he expected the money to be paid him in gold; that he was going to travel on horseback, and that he should return by a road on the opposite side of the river, as a precaution against the terrible robbers, who seldom visited Greene

county. How little did the unfortunate farmer imagine that he was confiding this secret to the very chief of that band of robbers! He even mentioned, casually, the very night on which he expected to arrive at home again. And Henry White proceeded on his last journey to Pittsburg.

Two days before the anticipated return of the farmer, Philip Kirke, "having received an important letter from a rich uncle," somewhere in the universe, announced his intention of leaving Weston for a few months, much to the regret of the belles of that vicinity, by whom he was regarded as an extremely fascinating young man. He accordingly took his departure on foot, leaving his effects at the village tavern, and stating that he would surely return at the expiration of two or three months, for the purpose of buying a large amount of the new crop of wheat.

He at once made his way to the den and informed his companions of the rich prize that awaited them. It was deemed expedient that three of their number should undertake the adventure; and it was agreed that Sam and Joe should be of the number, and that the third should be a guiding-spirit, in the person of either the captain or Bill, as a precaution against blunders. It was at first decided that Bill should conduct the affair, but this decision was revoked, on second thought, by the captain, who, knowing him to be a most hard-hearted and unscrupulous villain, and fearing that he might wantonly murder the victim, concluded to go himself, leaving that gentleman and the Busters to guard the castle, watch for the return of the expedition, and signal if all was right and the coast clear. This precaution was always taken on similar occasions, notwithstanding the seeming security of the place; for "The wicked flee where no man pursueth, but the righteous are bold as a lion." Captain Kirke did go, and the reader knows the result.

Henry White lay in the robbers' den in a strange, unnatural, uneasy sleep, unconscious of all around him—unconscious

of the presence of the villains in whose den he was a prisoner —alike unconscious of his own suffering, and unmindful of the mental agony of those who awaited him anxiously, yet durst not dream of his fate. And thus the day passed quietly away.

Without, the day was mild and beautiful. The sky was clear; the sun shone forth pleasantly, and looked down with his wonted cheerfulness on green fields of growing wheat, or on pastures where sheep and cattle grazed; on cornfields in which farmers and their sons were at work; on farm-houses, gardens, little villages (and, perhaps, a great way off, on busy, stirring cities); on extensive woodlands and wild mountains; and on no spot did he gaze more smilingly than on the placid Monongahela, as it swept smoothly by the base of that tall bluff in which, secure from honest eyes, was concealed the ROBBERS' DEN.

The birds were never more merry than on that day. How cheerily they sung, and how nimbly they hopped from branch to branch among the green foliage that covered the face of that wild hill! What musical notes they uttered near the mouth of the cave! At one time a little songster actually alighted among the vines at the entrance of the dismal den, and chattered away so merrily for several minutes, that it was almost impossible to realize that misery and death were so near.

Henry White lay till near nightfall, with scarcely a sign of returning consciousness. Before dark, Bill, moved more by a sense of curiosity than by any philanthropic feeling, washed the blood from the head of the wounded man, in order to discover the nature and extent of his hurt, when even his limited knowledge of surgery enabled him to ascertain that the skull was fractured. He imparted that fact to Kirke, who during the day had had frequent recourse to the stone jug, and who gruffly replied that his (Bill's) skull would have been cracked, too, if it had been favored with such a blow.

It had made the whole party feel at least uncomfortable, to have a man lying during the whole day in their domicile, in a dying condition. If Bill had had his own way about it, as he unreservedly stated to Sam, Joe, and the Busters, he would soon have put an end to the affair; but the captain's word was law, and Bill, though regarded as second in command, knew that there was nothing for him but to obey. He had often remonstrated with the captain on what he considered a foolish whim, namely, that of never taking life if it could be avoided—stating that *his* motto would be, never to allow a man to escape with his life if it could be helped; adding that this manly course was at the bottom of all success in their vocation, and that, until such course were universally adopted, the profession could not be expected to attain any reasonable degree of prosperity. But the captain was firm in carrying out his principles, and steadfastly opposed connecting murder with robbery; maintaining that they were two separate and distinct departments.

Frequent discussions arose between Bill and the captain. The former endeavored to impress the latter with a sense of his error by pointing out shining examples, such as Sweeny Todd; but the captain retorted by referring to Claude Duval, Dick Turpin, and others, who never killed men except in self-defence—which usually had the effect of silencing Bill for the time.

When night came a candle was lighted and set upon the rough table, a blanket having first been suspended at the opening, in order that no tell-tale ray of light should escape. Henry White now began to show signs of returning consciousness. He was heard to groan deeply, and now and then to mutter some inarticulate words. But he did not move till near ten o'clock, when, to the astonishment of all, he abruptly rose to a sitting posture, and stared wildly around him.

"Where am I?" he exclaimed.

No one replied.

"Oh, I remember," he said half musingly. "Yes, I re-

remember, I remember! Ah, Philip Kirke! Robber! murderer! traitor! I curse you! I'll curse you with my last breath! You've robbed my poor daughter of her father! Oh Mary! Mary! Mary! Take me to her," he resumed, softening. "Take me to her! Let me see her once more! It will soon be too late! Take me to her! Let me see her before I die! Oh Mary! Mary! if I could see you once more! Ah, Philip Kirke, I read you now! I see through your treacherous eyes into your black soul! It is for this I received you into my house—into my confidence! to be murdered by you, and laid down to die in this miserable den, with no one near me but you and your heartless, bloodthirsty companions! But oh," he went on, vehemently, "take me to my daughter, that I may see her again, and I'll forgive you! I'll not speak a word of what I have seen! No one shall know who has robbed and murdered me! I will not tell what a villain you are! Only let me see Mary once more! Oh Mary, Mary, Mary! what will become of you now?"

He sank back exhausted, but seemed to retain his consciousness. He breathed hard for a few moments, then, in a weak voice, asked for water. A cup of water was placed to his lips, which he drained; he then sank back upon his miserable couch, still glancing wildly about him.

All this time Kirke had stood gazing upon the dying man, without uttering a word; he now turned away, and seated himself in a distant corner of the cave, muttering as he did so, "Can't be helped now."

Ah, what poor consolation! Yet it was all he could say in answer to the voice of conscience. The possibility of White's recovery was evidently out of the question—death was upon him.

For more than an hour the sufferer lay perfectly motionless, gazing vacantly from one spot to another. Now his eyes would rest on a bucket or tincup that hung against the wall, barely seen by the dim light that burned within the

cave; then he would look for a minute or two upon some rude shelf or crevice in the wall; then his eyes would wander to remote corners or dark recesses of the cave, but not once did they close.

Not a word was spoken.

It was near twelve o'clock, when the dying man suddenly sprang almost to his feet, and, supporting himself against the wall, stared wildly toward the entrance of the cave, trembling from head to foot, as if from terror.

"Why, Mary!" he whispered, hoarsely, "you here?"

Kirke glanced uneasily toward the blanket, as though he expected to see it thrust aside by the farmer's daughter; but nothing of the kind happened; and it was clear that poor Henry White was delirious.

"You here, Mary?" he continued. "Child of my heart, why don't you come to me? Why stand there? No, no! you cannot save me now! Away! away! you are in danger! Fly, Mary! 't will soon be too late! Child, there 's a frightful precipice behind you! Why do you not move? Why look so strangely? There's a murderer ready to hurl you over? Who is he? I can't see his face! Fly, Mary! Don't let him touch you! Ha! he puts forth his hand! Oh, he'll murder my child! Why don't you fly? Oh, too late! too late! she is gone! Murderer! murderer! why have you killed my child? Who are you? Who—ha! I see! I see! It's KIRKE! yes, KIRKE! Oh Mary! Mary! my lost Mary!"

For a moment the form of Henry White remained motionless; the lips ceased to move; the breath no longer flowed; the face grew ashy pale; the eye became fixed and glassy, and the inanimate lump of clay fell upon the straw on which it had lain before—the spark of life extinct.

Kirke arose, took the candle from the table, and approached the corpse; but shuddered and started back as the cold, glassy stare of the murdered man met his eye.

"It's over, he muttered through his chattering teeth; "it can't be helped now."

CHAPTER III.

THE DAUGHTER.

MARY WHITE was the only child of her good old father. When she was a little girl of eight or ten years her mother had died, after a short illness; since which a maiden aunt (a sister of her father) had made her home with them, superintending the household affairs. Mary was the pet and pride of her father, and, indeed, of the whole community. Her innocent, unoffending manners, together with her beauty, won for her many friends. As she grew into womanhood, if there was any change, it was only a clearer development of her attractions. Her education, considering the limited facilities then and there presented, was as good as could be expected, extending to mathematics, geography, and a thorough knowledge of the English language.

At the time of which we write, Mary had just reached her twentieth year; and there was not, in the vicinity of Weston, a prettier or more intelligent girl. Several rustic youths had already proposed to lay at her feet what houses, lands, sheep, horses, cattle and agricultural implements they expected to fall heir to; but Mary had steadfastly avowed her purpose to remain with her father, who was all the world to her, and to whom she was all the world. Her Aunt Eliza (such was her name) highly applauded this course, and was often heard to observe, that if all of the fairer sex would only follow such bright examples, it would soon bring those benighted creatures of the masculine gender to a sense of their unworthiness and utter insignificance.

Mary, notwithstanding her desperate resolve to ignore the bliss of matrimonial life, did not pine at home like a caged

bird; she lost no reasonable opportunity of enjoying herself, like a sensible girl that she was.

None had been more attentive to Miss Mary White than the dashing, good-looking and evidently thrifty trader from Pittsburg, Philip Kirke; nor, indeed, had the attentions of any one been received with a better grace. Mary was, consequently, envied by some, as there was not a maiden in the settlement who did not think Philip Kirke—oh yes, by all odds—the handsomest young man it had ever been her privilege to look upon, and who would not have been exceedingly flattered, not to say delighted, by such gallant devoirs as he paid Mary. But Philip failed to see attractions in any but Miss White. At social parties or dances, which he was just beginning to attend, Philip showed a decided preference for her company; and he began to be almost persuaded that he loved her—if such a villain can ever experience that feeling.

There was one young man, the son of a rich farmer, who would have given half his existence for Mary; and all his interest in the "old man's" farm for the pleasure of "walking into" that "city chap," Phil. Kirke. His name was George Roland. He was a good-looking young man, a good fellow, the best shot, the best horseman, and the best jumper and wrestler about Weston. Even Philip Kirke was only second at such arts in a crowd where George was. There had been several trials of skill between them at the village, resulting invariably in favor of Roland. It was well known that they were rivals for the favor of Mary White, and that they entertained no very friendly sentiments toward each other; and it was confidently expected that a "row" would one day take place, with those two gentlemen as principals. And such a consummation became the more probable since a wrestling-match between them, early in the spring of which we write, had resulted in Kirke's being brought in fierce collision with the green-sward four times out of five.

Although George had but few enemies, Philip Kirke was

not without friends in and about Weston. Being of easy and unreserved manners, and quite lavish of money, he was, indeed, popular with the majority of the young men; and, being apparently a thorough business man, he was highly esteemed by the farmers, with whom he frequently dealt. With something of city polish, too, he was regarded as a "killing" fellow by not only the pretty country lasses, but also by their good mammas.

Ah, how deceitful is outward show! and what blackness it may cover up and conceal from the eyes of men! Here is a villain of the worst kind—a robber, a murderer—who has easily worked his way into the confidence, and even to the hearts, of an honest and unsuspecting community. How they would shudder were they permitted to take a single glance at the interior of this whited sepulchre! But wait! The day is coming on the swift wings of Time when you, Philip Kirke, will be unmasked before these wronged people, whose confidence you have abused, and they will see you as you are!

It is that same beautiful May morning on which Henry White was carried to the robbers' den to die. The sun has now risen far above the summit of the mountains which lie a few miles to the eastward, and the dew has already disappeared from the blades of grass and from the leaves of the bushes and trees. Farmers are busy in the fields, and their wives and daughters at the dairies or in the gardens. Everywhere the same rural scenes meet the eye; the barn, the farm-house, the lawn, the garden, the green meadow, the cornfield, the wheatfield, the wood, the hill and the valley. Some of the farm-houses are built of stone, some of logs, a few of bricks, and many of framework, covered with smooth boards, painted or whitewashed.

Although there is but little variation in the general appearance and surroundings of the many farm-houses which dot the rich country, there is one in particular, situated a mile east of the village of Weston in a visit to which we

most earnestly and respectfully solicit the reader's company. It is the home of Henry White. It is of cottage style, its snowy whiteness half hidden by green vines, which have climbed up the gables to the roof, and spread out their branches till they hang from the eves, and peer in at the lower windows. It stands on the face of a gentle slope, and there is a grassy lawn in front, inclining toward the public road. In the rear is a neat little garden, full of plants and flowers; on the right, a little way off, is the barn, with its huge stack of straw in front; on the left an extensive orchard, in a corner of which—ah, liveliest scene of all!—stands a straw-covered shed, that shelters a row of well-filled beehives. The clover that grows in the orchard, and in some adjacent fields, is just blooming, and the busy bees are out in force, and humming merrily from blossom to blossom. Still beyond, where the ground rises higher, is a wood of lofty trees, which wave to and fro when the storm approaches, like the tall masts of a ship that is riding upon the waves.

A young man approaches; he enters the lawn by the gate, and walks slowly up the path toward the cottage. It is George Roland. He looks happy when he sees that Mary is standing at the open door, which is shaded from the sun by a little porch, over which the vines are trailing; and he advances more rapidly.

"Good morning, Mary. I hope I am not intruding?" says George, merrily.

"How do you do, George. Intruding? Oh no; I am always glad to see you. Walk in."

"No, thank you; it is pleasant, and I will take a seat on this bench;" and George seats himself on a bench that stands on the little porch. "Has your father returned?"

"Not yet."

"Did you not expect him last night?" asks George, in some surprise.

"Yes, I even waited for him till after twelve; but I con-

cluded at last that he must have postponed his coming a day. He will surely come to-day or to-night."

"Then I will return to-morrow. I expect him to bring some tidings of an uncle of mine who lives in Pittsburg, and from whom I have not heard for a long time. But, Mary, you look a little anxious; pray sit down; there is room on this bench for two," says George, and Mary takes a seat beside him, much to his delight.

"Why, George," she says, "you know father said he would come home last night, and he is always very punctual; and, to tell the truth, I am more anxious than you imagine. I almost dread that something may have happened him."

"Oh, nonsense! Your father knows how to take care of himself. What could happen him, I should like to know? His horse is not a wild one, and—"

"But there are so many robbers about, and—however," says Mary, reassuring herself, "he told me he would return by the Washington road, beyond the river, and cross at Weston."

"Oh, then you need have no fear as to the robbers. They seldom visit Greene county," says George, confidently.

"True. It is very foolish of me to be alarmed, I know. I do not really imagine that any harm has befallen him." And Mary grows more cheerful; she forgets her anxious fears; they talk of commonplace things; they chat merrily together; they smile and laugh—yes, her ringing laugh is even heard.

Half an hour passes right happily. By and by there is a brief silence—of half a minute, perhaps.

"Mary, says George, abruptly, "I am told that that gay young Kirke has left us again."

"I believe he has," is Mary's reply. There is a perceptible change in her countenance.

"Well, I don't wish him ill," observes George; "but if he should never come back I have not the most distant idea that I should die of grief."

"I don't know that I should, either," retorts Mary; and it is evident, from her tone and manner, that she is not quite *sure* she should n't.

"Come now, Mary, you know you like him," says George banteringly; "he is such a good-looking fellow."

"I like everybody," Mary replies, evasively, and with affected lightness.

Oh, these country girls! When they are in love, how they do strive to conceal the fact.

"Well, Mary," says George, "I don't think much of these gay, showy fellows from the city. Much good is not apt to come of making love to them. I know a young fellow," he continues, after a brief pause, "perhaps no better than he should be, a little wild and a little rough, who loves you more than Phil. Kirke ever will; one who would suffer any pain to bring you enjoyment, and would freely give his poor life to purchase a happy one for you."

"Ah," says Mary, half mockingly, "he must be a very disinterested young man. Who can it be? Tell me."

"Oh, you know who it is," says George, gravely.

"No I don't, really."

"Can you not guess?" There is something sad in his voice as he asks this.

"Let me see," says Mary, gayly as ever; "let me see. Now, you *don't* mean Jerry Armstrong!" she exclaims, her face brightening up with a roguish smile.

Jerry Armstrong is a poor, half-witted fellow, who resides at the foot of the mountain.

"No, Mary; I see you mock me. You well know who it is. Oh, Mary, you know it is George Roland!" And he seizes her hand and kisses it passionately. "It is George Roland who loves you, Mary—loves you, adores you. I know he is not so handsome as Philip Kirke—not so dashing; does not wear such fine clothes, such bright jewelry, and such a valuable watch. But I—I—I—can—lick him!" And poor George, having exhausted all the eloquent words

he can command, and even commenced on the non-eloquent, throws his arms wildly about the maiden's neck, draws her face to his, and——

"George!" exclaims Mary, half alarmed by his vehement manner. "George, some one may see you! Don't!"

"I don't care! Everybody knows I love you! *You* know it, Mary! You have known it a long time! You could not help knowing it! Oh, Mary, if I dared hope that you could love me half so well!"

"Hush, George; Aunt Eliza might hear you," interrupts Mary, endeavoring to glance into the house, to ascertain if Aunt Eliza is within.

"But tell me, Mary," persists George, "whether I may hope or not. A long time I have remained silent, and even dared to dream that we might one day be happy. I might have nursed the fond dream in silence for a long time to come, but lately I have seen that fellow Kirke making himself so agreeable to you, and I have seen you smile on him as I would give half my life to see you smile on me once—just once; and this morning you look so beautiful, I am constrained to tell you, what, indeed, you already knew, that I love you. I've told you now, Mary; I know you believe me. Tell me, now, if I may hope. You have it in your power to make me happy or miserable from this moment." And poor George bows his head, as a convicted prisoner at the bar might do to hear his sentence.

"Why, George," says Mary, gently disengaging herself from the arms of the almost frantic lover, but still remaining seated by his side, "what a foolish fellow you are, to go on so. I would not, for the world, give you pain; you have been too good a friend to me, and I like you very much. But"—oh, that terrible word—"I do not love you, George. I have no desire at present to pledge myself to any one; my father is all the world to me, and I will not leave him. Now George, let us still be good friends, but pray don't speak to me again on this subject."

"Be it as you say, Mary," says George, with some resignation. "If we can be but friends, I will be a faithful one to you, and one whom you may ever command. But oh, Mary, I would rather see you love any one but Kirke. He is a stranger here; you don't know him as you do the boys of our own settlement. He may not mean well. He may be some——"

"George," interrupts Mary, evidently displeased, "I wish you would not talk in this way. We have every reason to believe that Mr. Kirke is a gentleman and a man of honor; all who have had dealings with him say so. Even were it otherwise, I should have no occasion to fear him. I assure you that I can and will take care of myself. So farewell to this subject; let us talk of something else."

"Is your decision final for all time, Mary? May I not even hope that——"

"Final, George. Let us be friends; we can be no more."

Ah, George, it is clear there is no hope for you. Oh, that Kirke!

"Then, Mary, I will say no more," says George, sadly; "but should you, in time, change toward me, and entertain more kindly feeling for me, remember I am still the same. I will return to-morrow," he continues, rising; "at present, good-by."

He takes her hand and presses it to his lips, then turns away. There is a sad look upon his face, as he passes through the lawn gate, and walks slowly down the road.

"Poor George," murmurs Mary, as he disappears among the woods through which the road takes its way. "Poor George; I am sorry for him. He is a true-hearted, honest fellow. I almost thought I loved him once. It was but a girlish fancy. I knew not what love was then; I know now. It *must* be hard to love and not be loved in return. Yet such may be my own sad fate. Oh, does Philip love me? and does he suspect yet that *I* love *him?* I have always fancied he loved me. Yet how reserved he appeared—al-

most cold—when he took leave of me a few days ago, before leaving Weston. Perhaps it was because of his love for me, that he feared to make it known lest he should not be favorably received. I am sure he trembled and looked strangely when he took my hand at parting. But he is coming back in two months; then I shall be happy. Hasten by, weary, weary time! Oh, Philip, God grant thee a safe return!"

Ah, Mary! Deluded girl! You are but mortal, and can only see what is visible around you. Could you see with the Omnipresent eye for one moment, and could you peer into the robber's den, but a few miles distant—that dark cave in the hill-side—with what a sudden start would your fancied love vanish!

Mary enters the cottage. Where is Aunt Eliza? Hope she didn't witness that interview. No, yonder she comes from the wood. Has been taking a walk. It certainly *is* a lovely morning.

"George Roland was here, Aunt; you did not see him, did you?" says Mary, as Aunt Eliza draws near.

Now, Aunt Eliza harbors a peculiar antipathy for men in general, and, though certainly unaccountably, for George Roland in particular.

"George Roland! That wild, reckless fellow? No, I did not see him. What did he want here?" Aunt Eliza speaks this all in one breath.

"He had expected to find father at home. Father is to bring him news from a relative in Pittsburg."

"Oh, *some* pretext, I'll warrant. I hope he was n't in the house?" queries Aunt Eliza, looking around, as though she half expects to miss from its place a table, a bureau, or the tall old-fashioned clock, which may have been carried off by the unscrupulous young man.

"No; I invited him in, but as the morning is so pleasant, he preferred to sit on the porch and talk."

"And talk? I hope you did not stand there talking with

that fellow! It's nothing to your credit if you did, and *might* be quite the reverse."

"Oh, no, I did not *stand;* I just took a seat beside him, and we had a pleasant chat of at least three-quarters of an hour."

Aunt Eliza is astonished.

"Aunty," remonstrates Mary, good-humoredly, "you must not be too hard on George Roland. I cannot see what cause you have to dislike him; he is a harmless fellow."

"Harmless fellow, indeed! They're all harmless when they can't help it. Oh, these heartless, deceitful men! But," and Aunty's countenance brightens exultingly, "thank goodness, none of them were ever sharp enough to make a fool of me, nor a slave either, with all their smooth-tongued flattery." And Aunty obviously enjoys this pleasant reflection, as memory goes back through the long vista of forty years, to the time when she was a gay lass of seventeen summers.

"Dear me, Aunty, how mercilessly you judge the opposite sex! What reason have you for it? Had you a lover once? and did he prove false?" asks Mary, roguishly.

"No, I can't say that I ever had a *lover*," replies Aunt Eliza, with a peculiar emphasis on the word; "but I had some admirers, and——"

"One in particular," suggests Mary.

"Yes," admits Aunty; "there was one young man—but recollect, I never cared for him—who was more attentive to me than any other. Week after week I lived in constant expectation of his proposing, that I might give him the mitten: and all of a sudden, to the surprise of the whole neighborhood, myself included, he went away to a village a few miles distant, and deliberately married, yes, *married* an ugly little minx, not much bigger than my arm; and all, I suspect, because her father was rich."

"What a heartless fellow!" exclaims Mary.

"I remember," continues Aunty, "of once hearing a pretty

little verse, which ever since I have treasured up as one of the wisest little productions outside of the Bible. Should you like to hear it?"

"Oh, very much, Aunty."

"Then here it is, and may it not be lost on you:

"'Write on the sand when the tide is low,
Seek for the words when the waters flow;
Cast a rose on the swelling sea,
Expect it again to return to thee;
Breathe to the evening air a sigh,
List for the sound when the wind goes by:
If those words again thou see,
Traced upon the sand by thee;
If that rose to thee return,
Upon the raging billows borne;
If that sigh again draw near,
Breathed by the wind to thy list'ning ear;
Then believe—and not till then—
That there is truth in the vows of men.'"

There is a silence of several minutes, which is broken at last by Mary.

"Do you not think it strange, Aunty, that father did not come home last night? He said he would, you know, and——"

"When you have seen as much of the world as I have, Mary," interrupts Aunty, "you will learn to attach but little importance to what men *say*. Even your father (though I *do* think that if there had been any perfect men made, he would have been one,) cannot be expected to redeem his word. He is but a *man*."

"But you know, Aunty, he is usually punctual; and I cannot imagine what has detained him."

"Why, if there is anything to detain him, it is probably looking up those friends of George Roland's. Dear me! I don't think *I* would go much out of my way to accommodate *him*. Let him go to Pittsburg himself," continues Aunty, in

a suggestive tone, "to look after his relatives; it would rid this community of him for a short time at least."

The conversation is dropped now, but is resumed by starts during the course of the day, frequently turning in the direction of the creature, man; and we gather from the general tenor that Mary White is more favorably disposed toward the male sex, as a body, than is Aunt Eliza. The day wears away with only the regular routine of household duties.

Night approaches.

"Surely, father will come to-night!"

Mary utters these words in a tone of anxiety and impatience as the hours go by.

Ten o'clock has come.

"Aunty," Mary exclaims, almost vehemently, "I'll not retire till father comes home!"

"Why, child, you might sit up till morning."

"I will do so, then, if he does not come before. I could not sleep. No, I'll watch till he comes."

Ah, Mary, 't would be a long, an endless watch! He will never return to you again. You will never again see his happy, joyous face brighten with pleasure at your welcome, as in days past, when you ran to meet him in the lawn, or at the little white gate!

Mary seats herself at the front window of the neat little parlor, and is soon the only wakeful one in the house. Aunt Eliza has retired. How quiet everything is, as Mary sits by the window gazing out into the dark night. The moon will soon rise; it will be light without then. Not a sound is heard save the slow, steady, monotonous "tick" of the old-fashioned clock that stands, specter-like, staring at Mary from its dark corner. There is a candle upon the table, but it has burnt down till a long, black, dismal-looking wick is mingled with the ascending blaze, causing it to diffuse but a dull light; yet Mary heeds it not; she is gazing out upon the lawn.

Hark! What sound? Oh, 'tis only the old clock striking

the hour of eleven. Why does it not strike faster? It has a slow, tedious way of telling off the hour, that sounds painful to-night. It adds to the dismal solitude that reigns, and the place seems more lonely than ever.

Eleven!

Done at last; then tick, tick, tick, as before. All else is quiet. The time drags wearily on. Another hour is almost gone, the quiet moon is up, and still the half-unconscious girl maintains her lonely watch at the cottage window.

"There's father, at last! But—"

What is the matter? Why do you not spring up, Mary? Why not rush forth to meet him? Why do you sit motionless? and wherefore so strange a look upon your face? What do you gaze at in such seeming terror?

Henry White is standing in the lawn, only a little way from the cottage window. How came he there? He was not seen to enter the gate. The moon shines full upon him. He stands motionless. His face is deathly pale; his eyes are fixed, in a strange stare, upon the window; his head is not covered; his hair is tangled, and—what? is that blood, that dark spot on his forehead? It is; and it starts afresh, and trickles over his pale face. He raises his hand and beckons, as though for help; but now he waves it, as though he said, "Back, away!" then vanishes.

There is a piercing scream of terror in the little parlor, followed by a sound as of a light form falling to the floor; then all is still.

No! The ticking of the clock, now doubly acute—and hark! One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven—TWELVE!

The fowls at the neighboring farm-yards, one by one, strike up their nocturnal songs to announce the hour; the howling of a distant dog is heard, and answered by others here and there. These sounds are soon hushed, and very Nature seems to sleep. It is midnight.

CHAPTER IV.

THE VILLAGE TAVERN.

THE village of Weston comprised some thirty or forty houses, chiefly those of storekeepers and mechanics. There was a brick church, without a steeple, on the hill behind the village, and a white wooden school-house a little way from it. There was a ferry across the river at this point, and several skiffs and "flat-bottomed" boats generally lay at the wharf. Raftsmen frequently stopped at the village, on their way to Pittsburg, with timber cut from the wooded shores of the Monongahela, and Cheat rivers, in West Virginia.

There was a neat tavern at the lower end of the village, near the wharf, whose popular and good-natured proprietor was known as "Tony" Baily. It is evident that his surname was Baily; but what his real Christian name was is but a matter of conjecture. It might have been Anthony or Antonio, but we have no direct evidence that it was either.

Tony Baily, with the co-operation of his industrious wife, conducted his little establishment with great care, and to the perfect satisfaction of every guest whom he entertained. The beds were comfortable; the furniture, the floors and walls were faultlessly clean, and the bill of fare unexceptionable.

There was a "bar" connected with the establishment, in which might be found the best of liquors of various descriptions—rye whisky, gin, apple-brandy, cherry-brandy and peach-brandy; added to which was a huge barrel of cider in the corner. There were no "fancy drinks" served up, nor even thought of then and there; and had any one stepped up to the bar and called for a "gin-sling," a "rum-

toddy," an "egg-nogg," a "tom-and-jerry," or even a "brandy-punch," it would have been regarded as the most crushing evidence of his insanity.

It was a hot day, early in the month of August. Tony Baily was sitting alone in an armchair in his bar-room, smoking a pipe after dinner. It was a dull day in the village; the harvest was not over yet, and the people of the country were busy in the fields. Even the village blacksmith, shoemaker and tailor had left their shops for awhile to aid the farmers in reaping and storing away their crops. Not a person was to be seen on the single street of the little village, save here and there, on the shady side, a group of "Young Americas," absorbed in the interesting and scientific game of "marbles."

Tony felt a little lonesome, with nothing to do and nobody to gossip with. But for his pipe, he would have felt positively "blue." He could barely maintain his equanimity by watching the smoke as it curled lazily up, after being ejected from his mouth; and it was with some interest that he observed how perfectly the ethereal vapor kept the flies from his face. He had smoked one pipe, and was just knocking the hot ashes out against the corner of his chair, when a shadow obstructed the open doorway, and darkened the room. He turned his head lazily, and, to his delight, saw at the door that good, lively fellow, Philip Kirke, who had been absent since May.

"Why, Phil.!" exclaimed Tony, springing from his chair, and overturning it in the operation, "I'm delighted to see you!" and he seized Philip Kirke by the hand.

"How do you do, Tony? I am glad to get back to the village once more; it is almost like home to me."

"How have you been, Phil.?" asked Tony. "I fancy you look a little thin. Have you not been well?"

He *did* look just a little wan.

"I have been quite well," he replied; "but I have been knocking around some since I left Weston."

"Eh! then you have not been in Pittsburg all the time?"

"No; I have been in Philadelphia on some important business."

"Away there?" exclaimed Tony, expanding his eyes and mouth, then contracting his eyebrows, in a vain attempt to bring his mind to bear on so distant a place.

In those days, a journey from Pittsburg to Philadelphia—now occupying about a dozen hours—was considered a "big thing," and days, nay weeks, were required for its accomplishment.

"You have not had your dinner yet," said Tony, after a pause; "so take a seat, and I will order it. What should you like?"

"Oh, anything," was the reply.

But Tony must have misunderstood the order; for when the dinner was ready, and all the dishes set on the table, it looked as though "everything" were a more fit word to convey an idea of the viands, vegetables, *etc.*, that graced the table.

"Will you take a drink before dinner?" asked Tony, as the bell rung to announce that the meal was prepared.

"Yes, brandy, if you please, Tony."

Philip Kirke did take a drink—and such a drink!

After dinner he rejoined Tony in the bar-room.

"Why, where's your appetite?" asked Tony. "You have not eaten long enough by half an hour."

"Oh I have eaten heartily, thank you," replied Philip, taking a seat in the bar-room.

"Any news from abroad, Phil.?" asked Tony.

"None, I believe. Any thing strange about Weston since I left?" asked Philip, in a careless tone.

"Strange! yes, Phil., I've got a piece of news that you'll be sorry to hear; something that don't often happen in these quiet country places."

"Ah! what is it?"

"Why, old Harry White is missing, and it is thought he has been murdered."

Philip almost sprang from his chair—he was so surprised, so astounded.

"Missing!" he exclaimed. "Murdered! My old friend, Henry White! Why how was it? Tell me all about it!"

Here was an opportunity for Tony to take an important part in a most delightful piece of gossip. Such opportunities did not occur every day. He was about to enjoy the pleasure of relating to one, to whom it was entirely new, all that was known of an occurrence that had produced the most extraordinary excitement throughout the whole community.

"Let me see," began Tony. "It was not long after you left us last May; in fact, if I remember correctly, Henry White had already gone to Pittsburg before you left, and—"

"Yes, I remember that he started for Pittsburg some days before I left; but he had not returned yet."

"Well," Tony went on, "you know that Henry White was a man who always redeemed his word, even on the most trifling occasions,—"

"Yes, I know."

"—and, on leaving for Pittsburg, he said he would be back in just a week from that night. Well, the week passed away, and the night came, (it was the night of the twelfth of May—I'll never forget it,)" he continued, meditatively, "and on that night he was expected home just as much as the sun was expected to rise above the top of the mountain next morning; but the night passed away, the morning came, the sun rose as usual, and Henry White did not come. Next day his sister and daughter—Mary, you know—"

"Yes, I know her," said Philip, as Tony paused.

"—felt rather uneasy, for they feared that his horse might have thrown him, or, as he had a sum of gold about him, that he might have been waylaid; so, when night came again, and he had not arrived, Mary determined to sit by the window and watch till he *should* come. But the night

passed away, the day came and passed away, weeks passed away, and still Henry White has not returned. But the strangest part of all," continued Tony, deliberately, "was—"

"What?"

"Why just at midnight, as Mary sat at the window, broad awake, and looking out toward the gate—the moon was up, and it was almost as light as day—she saw her father, old Henry White, standing right in front of the window, staring at her, and waving his hand. He was pale as death; there was blood on his face and among his long, tangled hair; and his clothes were torn and covered with dust. He stood a moment waving his hand, in a warning manner, then vanished like a ghost, as he, no doubt, was; and Mary fainted away in terror—why, Phil., you look awful pale!"

"I am so astounded by what you are telling me. Go on."

"Well, as I said, Mary swooned away, and was actually found by her aunt next morning, still lying insensible on the floor."

"Terrible!" said Philip, shuddering.

"The doctor was sent for, and soon after arriving restored her to consciousness. She then related what she had seen, declared that her father was murdered, and that she expected never to see him again. George Roland happened there that morning, and——"

"Who?" interrupted Philip, quickly.

"George Roland. He chanced to pass that way the same morning, and on hearing what Mary had seen, and learning that her father had not yet arrived, came straight to the village, and collected a crowd to go in search. Henry White, before going away, expressed his intention of coming up on the Greene county side on his return; so George, with a lot of the boys from town, and two or three from the country, crossed the river and scoured the country beyond, for miles around."

"Did they find any trace of him?"

"No trace of the missing man. They met a farmer, who

informed them that he had a stray horse in his stable, which, with saddle and bridle on, had come to his gate the previous morning; and on going with him, they identified it as that of Henry White. Thinking that the animal might have thrown him on the way, and either killed him or hurt him badly, they traveled the road he had no doubt come, for miles, making inquiries of every one they met, but no information could be gained to indicate where, when, or by what means the master and horse parted."

"Where does the farmer live, in whose keeping they found the horse?"

"Beyond the river, about a mile from the ferry."

"And has nothing at all been developed that might point to his fate?"

"Nothing. The authorities were apprised of the circumstances, and the case was even placed in the hands of a detective from Pittsburg; but several weeks' investigation proved fruitless; and, concluding that Henry White must have been followed from Pittsburg, and robbed and murdered on the way, he gave it up, and returned home. About three months have now elapsed, and still the fate of Henry White remains a mystery. Every one feels sure that he has been murdered, and that by some of the terrible brigands who have infested this neighborhood for a year past. The people are now more than ever determined to hunt them down. A company of sixty young men, with George Roland at their head, has been organized for the purpose. They all live in or around Weston, and are to be always ready, at a given signal, to assemble here. They have made several excursions to the mountains, up and down the river, and even into Greene county, in hopes of discovering the den of these villains. Their efforts, thus far, have been of no avail; but every one is confident that this same band of young men will be the means of bringing the robbers to justice at last."

"I most ardently hope so," said Philip Kirke. "But what is the signal that is to call them together?"

"It is the report of the little cannon we keep here to fire on Christmas and New Year's. Whenever there are any indications of the robbers near the village, the cannon is to be fired three times in succession, and all the crew are to come straight here, ready for the chase. None of them reside more than a mile distant, and there is no doubt that at any time, day or night, they can all be assembled right here in front of my door within a quarter of an hour."

"A good arrangement," observed Philip.

"Very. They are a determined set of fellows, too, and certainly able to cope with an equal number of the marauders. No one has the least idea as to the number of the robbers, wherever they may be; but certainly there are not enough to stand against George Roland's company of sixty."

"No, it is not probable they are so numerous," remarked Philip Kirke, half abstractedly. No doubt he was making a little mental calculation of how many times six are contained in sixty—quotient, *ten*. "But what of Mary?" he presently asked.

"Mary?" responded Tony. "Why, she, poor girl, was prostrated with illness, which for weeks was daily expected to terminate fatally. She rallied at last, though, and is quite well now, but very sad and low-spirited. A will was found, written and signed by her father, bequeathing all his possessions, valued at about fifteen thousand dollars, to her, and appointing, as guardian, her uncle (brother of her deceased mother), Ira Tate. A few weeks since, Mary, with her aunt, left her old home, and went to live with her uncle and guardian, who resides six or eight miles from here, at the foot of the mountain. The late home of Henry White is quite deserted now, and it is doubtful whether any person in the whole neighborhood could be induced to pass the night there. Some think that, as the ghost of Henry White did appear there once, it will probably wander about the premises every night till it can communicate with some one, expose the murderer, and tell where the body may be found; and no one

relishes the idea of receiving the information at the hands of the ghost. A few nights since, Will Hempstead was returning home from the village, and he distinctly saw the form of a man standing in the lawn. Will is not a coward, and he spoke to the figure; but when it only turned and stared at him, he suddenly remembered that he was late and ought to hurry home."

Again Tony was only telling Kirke what he already knew. It was no other than himself whom the redoubtable Will Hempstead had seen, he having a few nights previously visited the deserted premises. As it was at a rather late hour, he had supposed Mary and her aunt to be abed; he was not aware that they had removed to the mountain.

"By the way, Phil.," said Tony, who had came near forgetting an important point, "you don't happen to know Ira Tate, Mary's uncle?"

"No, I am not aware that I have ever seen him," returned Kirke.

"Well," said Tony, "he is the queerest man that ever lived. He is a most secluded man, and is seldom seen beyond the limits of his farm. But what is most remarkable is his irritable temper. He is not really a bad-hearted man; but the most trivial vexation arouses him in a second, and throws him into a towering rage; then he is sure to vent his ire on some unoffending object. Once he accidentally cut his foot with an ax, while chopping wood, and what did he do but walk straight to a big rock near by, and fall to cutting and chopping at it like a madman! Nor did he cease to deal heavy blows with the ax, till he had battered the edge off, and it was blunt as a mallet. Having thus vented his wrath, he threw the ruined ax away, walked calmly to the house, and bound up his wounded foot. At another time he was walking across one of his fields, accompanied by a favorite dog, watching some crows that were in the habit of taking up his planted corn; when his shins suddenly came in painful contact with the sharp corner of a stump, throwing him

headlong to the ground. Springing up in a rage, and there being unfortunately no crows within range of his gun, what should he do but up and blaze away at the poor unoffending dog, blowing half his head off. Then, in remorse for what he had done, he made amends by breaking his gun across the stump, and leaving the pieces lie. He then went home, actually crying, locked himself up in a room, and did not come forth again for two days. It was, perhaps, a fortunate thing that his gun was not a double-barreled one; for had it been, there is little doubt he would have sent the contents of the second barrel into his own head, after killing the dog."

"Why," said Philip, half in awe, "he is a dangerous man."

"No," returned Tony, "not especially dangerous; he never vents his wrath on the persons of human beings, unless they are the cause of it, or chance to laugh at him."

"Laugh at him?"

"Yes. Did you chance to be standing by, and see him accidentally cut or burn his fingers, or anything of that sort, and were you even so much as to smile, he would in all probability make a savage rush for you in the heat of the moment's passion, and if you did not get out of the way, you would be likely to get a pounding which you should never forget. He is a powerful fellow, too. I do not think there is a stronger man in Fayette county. Last fall I was returning from the mountain, where I had been after chestnuts, when passing his house I saw him carrying a log of wood that would have been a load for six men. I have heard men say 'there is nothing in a name;' there may not be as a general thing; but if there ever was a man whose name nearly expressed his disposition, his certainly does."

"How so?" asked Philip, as Tony paused to take breath.

"Why, don't you see?"

"I am not sure that I do."

"Then I'll explain. His name is Ira Tate; well, the addition of a single letter will make it *irritate*. In fact, he is called 'Old Irritation,' for short; he is scarcely ever

spoken of by any other name; but those who speak *to* him are careful to address him by his real name. If a man were to address him as 'Old Irritation,' he would soon see that he had given cause for *new* irritation."

Philip Kirke laughed. The case of Mary White's good uncle was a remarkable blending of name and nature; such, indeed, as is seldom met with. Men's characters are not often so nearly defined by their names. In truth, I may say, quite the reverse. I knew a Mr. Fear once, who was one of the boldest of men; and my astonishment on one day being introduced to an incredibly tall man, whose name was Low, was only equaled by meeting, a little while after, a very dwarf of a man whose cognomen was Hie. I know a Mr. Allbright who is not at all bright, and a Mr. Dull who is very sharp. I do not think there is a man in any country where the English language is spoken, who cannot point out a number of persons within the circle of his acquaintance, whose names are equally inconsistent with their natures.

"So, Mary is living with this uncle of hers," observed Kirke.

"Yes, poor girl! Her father, whom she loved more than all else, is taken away from her, and she has need of a friend and companion now, more than e r. She is the best of girls —intelligent and handsome; eh, Phil.?"

Kirke did not reply; but his face wore a very thoughtful expression.

"Have the robbers committed any depredations lately?" he asked, after a silence of a few minutes.

"For two months following the disappearance of Henry White," replied Tony, "they were not heard of anywhere in the neighborhood, which is pretty clear evidence that they are guilty of his murder; but within the past few weeks they have resumed their old tricks. One night last week a peddler was robbed of about three hundred dollars, a few miles from the village; and the same night quite a supply of provisions disappeared from Mr. Williamson's cellar.'

"It is very strange," observed Philip, "that they cannot be detected. I wonder where their rendezvous can be?"

"In the mountains, no doubt," replied Tony, who partook of the popular opinion; "but, be it where it may, if it is on top of ground, I'll wager a barrel of the best old rye I have, that George Roland and his party will find it out at last."

"I should not like to be in any of their shoes, if captured," observed Philip. "What *do* you think would be done with them?"

"If I get *my* way," said Tony, deliberately, "when they are taken, I will bury them all alive, except their leader, if they have any."

"And what would you do with *him?*" asked Philip, in surprise.

"Hang him up," said Tony, almost fiercely, "by the heels —yes, by the heels—to some tree on the mountain, and let the vultures pick the flesh from his bones before his own eyes. Then I would have his whited skeleton brought to the village, and hung up in the most public place—in front of my house, for instance—as a terror to all evil doers in ages to come."

In contemplation of such possible contingency, Philip Kirke, captain and commander of the robbers' den and its forces, took a social drink with Tony, and walked out for a stroll about the village.

"Of course we'll expect you for supper?" observed Tony.

"Oh, certainly; and for many suppers to come. I shall stay with you for several months—all winter, perhaps," replied Kirke, walking leisurely up the street.

"A fine, gentlemanly fellow, good pay, and a sensible man to talk to," muttered the loquacious Tony, proprietor of the village tavern, as he proceeded to fill his pipe with particles of tobacco cut from a "plug" of the article which he carried in his pocket.

CHAPTER V.

THE GRAVEYARD GHOST.

It was a clear, pleasant night in September. The moon had not yet risen, but millions of stars twinkled in the dark blue heavens, all the more brightly because there was no pale moonlight to make their luster dim.

The hour was nine.

Two young men were approaching the village of Weston at a leisurely pace, by the mountain road. They were Will Hempstead and John Duffey. The former was a sensible, honest, and industrious young man of twenty-two, who resided on a well-cultivated farm a mile or so east of the village. The latter was a most mischievous and fun-loving fellow of twenty. He lived in the village, where his father kept the principal store of the vicinity. He was in reality a good sort of a fellow, and was always happy to render any one the slightest service, even at his own inconvenience. But then he would go almost any length for the sake of a little sport; and the tricks he played, however delightful to himself and amusing to spectators, were generally most uncomfortable to the unhappy victim.

Early on the evening in question, he had walked out to the residence of his chum, Will Hempstead, for the purpose of prevailing on that gentleman to accompany him on the following day, in an expedition to recover, in a summary way, a fine horse which had been stolen from him a month previous, and which, he had just ascertained, was now in possession of a well-known rascal residing in a town in Greene county, some twenty miles from Weston. As it was expedient to start early in the morning, Will had consented to

accompany his friend at once to the village, and stay with him that night.

Now, as they were passing the churchyard just without the village, they suddenly felt the blood run cold in their veins, and experienced a remarkable inflexibility of the hair, as they saw, "with their own eyes," and they "in their sober senses" and "wide awake," a form and figure of spotless white, gliding with strange, unnatural tread among the green graves and old gray stones that thronged the quiet churchyard.

"Death and destruction!" exclaimed Will, in a suppressed voice. "What's that?"

"A ghost, by all that's fearful!" shuddered John, in reply; and both were on the point of taking to their heels.

"It's coming toward us!" whispered Will, in dismay, as the ghostly figure, in its wanderings, turned deliberately in the direction of the gate near which the frightened young men stood.

"Stay!" whispered Duffey, with a determined effort to master the terror he naturally felt. "Stay! Let us conceal ourselves in the bushes here, and when it comes near we may discover what it is. If it be some cuss in a sheet trying to scare us, we'll give him a rock or two."

With some hesitation, Will crouched beside his friend among the bushes that grew by the fence, and in trembling, breathless silence, they watched the movements of the specter.

The latter certainly seemed unconscious of any mortal presence, for it moved slowly on till within a few feet of the gate, stood motionless a moment, then slowly turned away and resumed its walk among the graves. Duffey and his friend now discovered that the ghost was chanting, in a low and scarcely audible tone, some strange and melancholy verse; and as they distinctly heard the words, "*Sleep with the dead!*" their emotions amounted to awe. But suddenly, while the strange being was slowly receding from them, John Duffey somewhat astonished his friend by clutching his arm and

endeavoring to whisper something in his ear, while almost choking with irrepressible laughter. Will was alarmed at this symptom, for he imagined that his friend had suddenly gone mad, no doubt from some strange influence wielded by the ghost; and he even began to wonder how many seconds should elapse ere he himself should be affected in a similar way. He *was* speedily affected in a like manner, as his friend presently found words to whisper, "It's Sallie Crane!"

It is now expedient that the reader should know who Sallie Crane was. She was a poor, harmless, unfortunate creature, who from her youth had been a kind of lunatic. She had a curious fancy to wander away from her home, and stroll among the woods or over the fields; and frequently eluding the vigilance of her parents and sisters, who watched her carefully, she would walk away and wander listlessly about for hours. The time, whether day or night, and even the condition of the weather, mattered little to her. The darkness of the night, the thunder, the lightning, the rain, and the storm did not terrify her. Above all she seemed to delight in a walk about the churchyard, of a dark night; and more than once had her friends found her there and conducted her home.

On the present occasion, Sallie had left her bed-room, unseen by her friends, who still supposed her to be asleep there; and gliding away (with no apparel on save such sundry white garments as ladies usually repose in), had bent her steps to the quiet churchyard, where she was having a pleasant stroll when Will Hempstead and John Duffey chanced that way.

"So it is. Sallie Crane, as I'm a sinner!" returned Will Hempstead. "And here have we, two vigorous young men, been frightened almost out of our wits by that harmless girl. Oh, it is a joke! I would n't have it known for a pretty sum. But we ought to send her home, or go and inform her father of her whereabouts."

"No, wait; let us watch her, and see what she will do," replied John.

"I would like to know what strange whim brings her here," said Will.

"So would I. But I know *one* thing: she gave me about as awful a fright as I ever enjoyed. Ah, look! she has stopped under the big willow tree, and there, by George! she has calmly taken a seat on the stone that covers old John West's grave! But, ha! how is that?" exclaimed John, as the white figure, apparently sinking into the earth, disappeared from view.

"I half believe it *is* a ghost, after all," said Will, with a shudder.

"Her own, perhaps. She may have died suddenly, and we not have heard of it," suggested John, as the cold sweat started from his face.

"Confound if I'll stay here much longer," said Will, now more terror-stricken than ever.

"Let us away to the village, then, and the ghost catch the hindmost," said John. "But stop!" he exclaimed, as a bright idea struck him; "I see it all now. It's no ghost. It's Sallie Crane after all."

"But where has she gone to?"

"Oh, that is easily explained; you know there is a brick wall around old West's grave—"

"Yes, I know, but—"

"Well, last Sunday I was over there, and I noticed that a portion of the wall had crumbled down and fallen out, so that any person so disposed could crawl in upon the grave. Now I'll bet my head that Sallie is in there. A snug place, too."

John West was the name of a revered old citizen, who in his lifetime had founded the town of Weston. He had gone to his final rest many years before, and his remains were interred beneath a spreading willow that stood in the churchyard, about thirty paces from the gate. A brick wall, three

feet high, had been built around the grave, and on the wall rested a marble slab, on which was inscribed

"The name and years spelled by the unlettered muse."

The wall had grown old and unstable, and a number of the bricks had become loose and tumbled out, disclosing an unoccupied space capable of containing about eleven bushels. As Duffey surmised, the poor girl had crept through the aperture, and was now reposing within the narrow inclosure.

"I wonder if she *is* there?" said Will.

"Certainly she is," responded John; "it is just like her; and if not disturbed, she would probably lie there till morning."

"Then let us take the poor girl home."

"No, let us have a little fun out of the affair; we deserve it after our fright," said Duffey.

"But how *can* we?"

"I'll tell you. Ned Stanton was in town when I left, and, as he was about half tight, I have no doubt he is there yet. You know what a blow he is; he boasts that nothing can frighten him. In truth he is *not* a coward; I never saw him scared yet. I don't believe he fears anything in the shape of man or beast. But as for ghosts, I think if there is fear in him at all, they are the things to frighten him. Now, if we could only entice him out here—"

"But it would be too bad; the poor girl—"

"Oh, nonsense! Poor Sallie will be none the worse for having frightened Ned a little. I have a plan. Come with me to the village; we'll be sure to find Ned at Tony's, and if we don't see some fun out of this affair yet, then call me a stupid. Will you go?"

"Yes, come on."

With this Duffey and his friend, "on mischief bent," started at a brisk pace for the village. Let us precede them thither.

Ned Stanton, as he was called, was a lively, blustering, and rather egotistical young man of twenty-five. He was an indolent fellow by nature, and somewhat given to dissipation. Sometimes he would "straighten-up" for a few months, and work right industriously; occasionally doing a little business in the way of speculating. He lived with his father, a well-to-do farmer, who resided about two miles south of the village. Ned was a talkative fellow at the best; but when he found himself outside a "glass" or two, talk seemed to flow spontaneously from his mouth, and the words dropped from the end of his tongue in such quick succession, that it required a quick ear to pick them up. In one breath he would tell what he had seen, what he had done, what he could do, and what he wasn't afraid to do. He would hold the unhappy listener spellbound for hours, without allowing him a single space to slip a word in, or exposing a single avenue of escape. He was, however, a good-hearted fellow, and not at all selfish or arrogant. It is said, "an empty cask sends forth a loud sound;" but Ned was cercertainly an exception to the general rule. He was a large, powerful fellow in form, and was neither a fool nor a coward. He had not many enemies, nor yet many intimate friends. He had *one* firm friend, however, for whom he would not have hesitated to lay down his life, had it come to that. That friend was the village blacksmith—a man a few years older than himself, and very different in disposition. He was a most quiet and sedate man, and was never known to speak unless he found it positively necessary. His name was Richard Miller; but his civil demeanor had gained for him the ironical sobriquet of "Noisy Dick."

On that same September evening Ned and Dick were seated together in Tony Baily's bar-room, smoking their pipes, and occasionally taking a drink. No one else was present save Tony, who sat reading a newspaper which had been sent to him by some far-off friend. Philip Kirke still sojourned at the village tavern, but was absent that evening.

Dick had not spoken for an hour. Ned *had* spoken for an hour, and that without intermission. He had been narrating to his friend a thrilling adventure he had once had in Pittsburg, in which he had "licked" three stout ruffians who had attacked him, and knocked down four watchmen who attempted to "take" him, thereby making his escape. At last he got through; he had told Dick all, and he actually stopped talking, much to the astonishment of his friend, and was silent for a full minute. During that silence he relighted his pipe, which had long since gone out for want of attention.

It was now, however, *his* turn to be astonished. His astonishment was caused by the sudden breaking of the silence by Dick. He so seldom heard him speak that his voice sounded almost strange.

"Ned," said he, solemnly.

"What?" asked Ned, who wished to encourage his friend in the talking way.

"Ned," said Dick, in a low tone, "one of us has it in his power to render the other a service."

"I can't imagine what you mean," said Ned, who supposed that his friend was just emerging into insanity; and it was only on such grounds that he could account for his having spoken such an unusual number of words at all.

"Then I'll explain," said Dick.

"Go on," said Mr. Edward Stanton.

"You know Matilda Tate, Mary White's cousin?"

"Daughter of Old Irritation?"

"Yes."

"Oh yes! Know her quite well—*very* well. But what of her?"

"Do you love her?"

"Love her! You astonish me!" exclaimed Ned, who now considered it quite clear that Dick's mind was wandering.

"Do you?"

"Do you ask me in earnest?"

"Yes; do you love her?"

"No, then; not by a darned sight."

"You don't?"

"No."

"You are sure you don't?"

"Certainly."

"And never will?"

"Never will, if I live to be as old as the White Rocks!"

"Then it is you who are to do me a service. Had you loved her, I could have done you a good turn—"

"How?"

"By informing you that your feeling was reciprocated, and that you might hope."

"What, Dick, you don't mean to say that *she* loves *me!*"

"Yes, Ned, I have accidentally discovered that she does. It is a long story to tell *how* I made the discovery, and I cannot tell you all just now; but of one thing you may rest assured, and for that you have the word of a friend—she is struck after you, Ned; she wants you, and—"

"But how can I serve you? I do not see that all this has any bearing on that point."

"I'll tell you. I want you to avenge me."

"Avenge you! How?"

"Listen, and I will tell. Ten years ago I was just emerging into manhood, and Matilda was a blooming lass. (She is rather on the old maid list now.) She was, in fact, a perfect coquette. She took *me* in, Ned. I admired her beauty with all the gallant ardor of a boy of nineteen; I courted her; was encouraged with the most lavish smiles; I adored her—worshiped her; she knew it; she still drew me on. At last, after a year of blissful dreaming, I told her all; told her I loved her; told her I adored, worshiped her; told her that I and all I possessed were at her disposal. She smiled so sweetly while I, fool that I was, was pouring out my soul to her, that I felt sure that her name would be Mrs. Miller before a month; but when I had finished—when I had said

all the endearing words I could think of—what do you think she said?"

"Could n't tell for my life," said Ned.

"She simply said, 'O you silly fellow! I never thought you would be so foolish as to fall in love, or I would have dismissed you long ago.' 'But' said I, 'tell me, will you be mine? Will you make me happy?' But she laughed outright—a laugh that pierced my very heart—and said she would as soon think of marrying Jerry Armstrong—you know Jerry—and that she never had supposed I was thinking of love or marriage. She said she had supposed my attentions to have been merely those prompted by friendship. Oh, the heartless girl! What pleasure was it in her to rend my heart by such cruel deception? But I don't love her now. I hate her! Now, Ned, I'll tell you what I want you to do for me, as a friend."

"What is it? I'll do anything you ask," said Stanton.

"Make love to her; show her the most flattering attention; court her, and just when she thinks she has you, *cast her ruthlessly off*," said Dick, bitterly. "Will yo do it?"

"Will I? Yes, Dick; if it is in my power I will."

"Oh, it will be an easy matter. She is now about thirty years old; she has thrown away many an opportunity to marry, only for the pleasure of flirting. Now, however, she is beginning to fear that she will die an old maid. She wants a husband; and, of all men, she wants you. She loves you—if such a heart *can* love; I discovered it strangely enough, and you may rely upon the truth of it. Will you serve me?"

"Assuredly."

"Then do so, and I will thank you. At present that is all I have to say," said Dick, in conclusion.

And it was. Dick, who had not talked so much for a month before, again lapsed into his wonted silence.

Ned was about to introduce some new topic of conversation, when Will Hempstead and John Duffey entered.

"How are you, boys? Come and take a drink," said Ned.

"Hilloa! You here, Ned?" said John Duffey. Why this is the first time I have seen you since that night we saw the ghost on the mountain." He alluded to an adventure which he and Ned had had some months previous.

"Ghost be hanged!" responded Ned. "That was no more ghost than I am. I'll bet my hat it was some fellow trying to scare us; and if ever I find out who it was—"

"Come now, Ned, you know you were scared that night," urged John, interrupting his threat.

"Scared! *I* scared? *I?* Nary time. If there *were* such things as ghosts, which there are not, I'll stake my life I would n't fear all that could stand between the river and the mountain. But, nonsense; there are no such things as ghosts, so take a drink."

And they all took a drink.

"I hope you will not think me superstitious, Ned," John resumed, as he seated himself near Ned Stanton; "but there certainly are unaccountable things in this world, call them ghosts, or what you may. There can be no doubt in the world that a graveyard, for instance—"

"Oh, fudge!" interrupted Ned. "I'd just as lief sleep in a graveyard, on a pleasant night, as in my bed. Talk of your graveyard ghosts! Hav n't I, many a night, passed the graveyard out here by the church? and did n't I sleep in it one night when I was too drunk to get home; and hav n't I played cards in the church hard by from sunset to midnight, and from midnight till morning? and—"

"Did you never see anything strange?" interrupted Will Hempstead.

"No, nor—"

"Did n't you just *feel* a little queer?" suggested Duffey.

"No, not a darned bit. If any difference, I felt rather better than usual," asserted the imperturbable Ned.

"That," explained Duffey, "was because the spirit of some departed friend hovered near you, causing you to feel, in fact—"

"Pshaw!" interrupted Ned. "There's no such thing; you know there is n't! Did *you* ever see anything there, or anywhere else, to—"

"Well, whether you believe it or not, I *have* seen strange things there," said John, mysteriously.

"And so have I," put in Will.

"So strange that I would n't care about sleeping there," said John.

"Or even walking through it after nightfall," added Will.

"Well, responded Ned, "whenever you chance to see anything there again that you can't unravel, just send for me; and if I do n't walk in and make an investigation then I'll agree to—to—leave off drinking for a year," concluded Ned, naming the worst penalty he could think of at the moment.

"Ghosts can be seen there any night, if you know how to call them up," said Duffey."

"They can, can they?" retorted Ned, half curiously.

"Yes, they can."

"To-night, for instance?" suggested Ned.

"Yes, Ned, to-night. But *I* would not be the man to call them up for all the farms between here and Brownsville."

"*I* would, then. Just tell me how it can be done, and I'll go to the graveyard and raise a perfect mob of them; yes, and talk to them in a way that will astonish them, when they *are* raised—*when* they are raised."

"Oh it is easy enough; easier than you think, so far as the action goes; but then the courage—"

"Oh, fudge! Tell me how you think they can be called up, and I will soon convince you that there are no such things as ghosts."

"You will?"

"Yes, and there's my hand on it;" and Ned extended his hand.

"Then," said John, "all you have to do is to go to the churchyard, mount upon a grave or tombstone, and shout three times, at the top of your voice, 'Come to judgment, O

ye dead!' and if you do n't see something startling I'll agree there are no ghosts in existence."

"I'll do it."

"When? to-night?"

"Yes, at once."

"You will?"

"Yes, I'll mount upon any grave you mention, and I'll shout, 'Come to judgment, O ye dead,' a dozen times, if you like."

"Very well, then; if you will go now to the churchyard, mount upon the stone that covers old John West's grave, and shout, three times, 'Come to judgment, O ye dead,' I will keep you in whisky for six months; here are witnesses to the bargain."

"Done!" exclaimed Ned, in transports. "Agreed, I'm off! Ho for the land of ghosts! Ho for the graveyard! Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!" and he rushed from the bar-room, and made for the churchyard with a speed entirely uncalled for.

John, Will, Tony and Dick followed, at a little distance, to see the sport.

When Ned reached the gate he flung it open and entered, without observing a dark figure that stood in the road, and that suddenly glided among the thick bushes that grew opposite the churchyard gate. As yet the adventurer had not faltered, for he did not doubt that his bar-room friends had followed at a respectful distance, and here was certainly a glorious opportunity to exhibit his courage.

It was a lonely place there, in the churchyard. The night was rather dark, at the best; but when he stood beneath the wide-spreading willow tree, he found the gloom intense. A slight breeze was blowing, and the rustling of the leaves and branches above his head sounded very solemn. He half wished that some other grave than that of old John West had been selected for the experiment. However, he was in for it; so, mounting boldly upon the marble slab, he called out, in a voice that almost hushed the breeze:

"Come to judgment, O ye dead! Come to judg—"

At this moment poor crazy Sallie, aroused from a light sleep into which she had fallen, and imagining the voice of Ned to be that of some one of her friends calling to her, crept meekly forth from her snug resting-place and rose to her feet, her white garments clearly visible to the startled gaze of Ned. He was no coward, as we have before stated; but then to see a white apparition so unexpectedly issuing forth from a grave beneath his very feet, and that, too, at his own bidding, was too much for mortal nerves. In a second his courage took wings and flew away, the "cold chills" shot through his frame, and, with a scream of terror, he sprang from his dismal perch, and away he went, bounding and flying like a wild deer over graves and tombstones, now falling headlong over an unusually high grave, and scrambling convulsively to his feet; and, in the darkness, he missed the gate, and brought up against the fence with such force that he recoiled upon his back on a new-made grave; then, struggling to his feet again, he cleared the fence at a bound, and, with another piercing scream, he fell senseless in the road.

At this moment a second dark figure, that was moving along the road, coming from the direction of the mountains, darted among the bushes near where the first had disappeared, and, in a suppressed tone of terror, exclaimed:

"Great heaven! is that the ghost of Henry White come to judge me!"

If the first dark figure had ears they must have heard the exclamation.

Duffey and the others, who had arrived to within thirty or forty paces of the gate, now hurried up to the assistance of the unfortunate Ned.

Poor Sallie, the innocent cause of his terror, having awaked from her slumber in a somewhat rational mood, slunk away to her home, and returned to her chamber. Her absence had not been discovered by the family.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MYSTERIOUS FIGURE.

More than a month had elapsed since Philip Kirke's return to the village, and it was now about the middle of September. The heat of the summer had abated, and the pleasant days that herald the approach of autumn were come. Thus far Philip had remained idly about the village, making his home at the tavern, occasionally taking a ramble into the country, and several times visiting the rendezvous. Now, however, it began to be time for him to bestir himself in a business way. Farmers were beginning to thrash their grain, which would soon be for market; and it behooved him to begin to purchase, in order to continue in the character of a speculator, that he might still, unsuspected, practice his treachery and deception upon the confiding people. He, therefore, resolved to remain at Weston during the whole winter, and to proceed, as soon as expedient, to purchase a large amount of grain, on which, by shipping it to Pittsburg, he had ascertained that he could realize a large profit.

Though his conscience was not yet quite dead, he was far from being repentant, or he would probably have removed far from the scenes of his crimes, instead of hovering about them. Conscience still feebly chided him for not abandoning his evil ways, and endeavoring to make amends, by a life of honesty, for the misdeeds he had committed, and often harrowed him for that worst of all his crimes, the murder of Henry White. But he drank frequently, and bade conscience avaunt. Visions of that terrible night on which the old man died in the cave often visited him in his sleep, and even

dreams of crimes he had never done. Once he dreamed of again seeing Henry White, as he had seen him in the cave on the night of his death, with his pale face covered with blood, his hair tangled, his eyes starting from their sockets, his arms moving in wild gesticulations. But the scene was changed. He was not in the cave. He stood at the brink of a fearful precipice on the mountain. Suddenly, in a voice so loud that all the people of the settlement seemed to hear, he shouted that Philip Kirke was his murderer, and that he would have revenge. Then, in his dream, Philip rushed upon the old man to dash him over the precipice, and thus silence him; but he called aloud for help, and his daughter Mary suddenly appeared on the scene, and came to his assistance. Ere she reached them, though, he seized his victim and hurled him over the brink, then turned, seized Mary, and threw her after him; but as she fell she clutched his arm, and he lost his balance and fell headlong from the dizzy height, uttering a scream, in the midst of which he awoke to find himself springing from his bed in the village tavern, and the cold sweat starting from every pore.

It was a pleasant afternoon in September that Philip, having regaled himself at Tony's bar, sauntered from the village and walked out the mountain road. A little more than a mile from the village this road was intersected by another, which led on the one hand to Brownsville, and on the other to Fairmont—then a flourishing town in Western Virginia. On reaching this road (which, by the way, ran but a few hundred yards east of Henry White's house) Philip turned to the left, thus taking his way down the river. Several miles brought him to the house of an old farmer, of the name of Daniel Patton, with whom he bargained for several hundred bushels of wheat and rye. He was urged to remain for supper, which he did, and near evening he took his departure. But he did not at once return to the village, although he started in that direction. He no sooner found himself beyond sight of the farmer's house, than he

left the road and struck through the thick woods and across the rough hills toward the river. About sunset he reached the brink of an almost perpendicular height that overlooked the Monongahela, and found himself standing about two hundred feet above the robbers' den. Signals having been exchanged, he climbed carefully down the craggy rocks, and stood upon the narrow shelf in front of the cave, where he was welcomed by no less a personage than William Hardin, Esquire.

"Hilloa, captain! This you?" exclaimed that individual.

"Yes. How are you, Bill?" was the response.

"I'm well, and mighty glad to see you, I can tell you! Why, I begun to think you was dead! It's been nigh on to two weeks since you was here, ain't it?"

"Yes, about that time," returned Philip. "I don't like to come too often; it's always attended with some risk. But where are the boys?"

"Oh, they've jes started fur the New Market road, t'other side o' the river."

"What, something on hand?"

"Yes; they're goin' to tap a old feller 'at's to come along that way to-night."

"Do you think they will manage it well?"

"Oh, yes. I give 'em the d'rections, an' if they only follow 'em they'll do the matter up in good style. I'd a gone along myself, only I've jis got back from a excursion to New Market, where I passed myself off for a gentleman, and got the information about this fellow slick enough. You see he's goin' to Pittsburg to buy goods, an' as he wants to take the stage from Brownsville to-morrow mornin', he's goin' there to-night on hoss-back, calkelatin' to send the hoss back by itself, as it is a sensible critter, and knows the road very well."

"What time will they return?" asked Philip.

"Well," returned Bill, "as the old chap was to start early in the morning, so as to git to Brownsville in time for the

morning stage, I reckon he'll git to where they're waitin' fur him about eight or nine o'clock. So they'll be sure to be back by 'leven at the furdest."

"Then I will not get to see them."

"Why, you're not goin' back to—what-ye-call-em to-night?"

"To Weston? Yes. It would not do for me to stay away, without being able, in case I were asked, to give an account of where I slept."

"That's a fact, captain. Well, what's the news, anyhow?"

"Nothing strange: everything is quiet at the village. The people are still determined to find out the robbers whom they have never seen yet, and to unravel the mystery of Henry White's disappearance. They are confident he has been killed by the same men who have been so adroitly robbing in the settlement for the last two years. I tell you, Bill, it makes me shudder sometimes to hear them talk at the village of what they will do when they capture the robbers. There is an organized party, with a reckless young fellow of the name of Roland at their head, who are to make it their business to search for our rendezvous, or to pursue any of us who may be seen attempting to rob—that is, in case an alarm can be given in time. It would go hard with us if we were to get into their hands; but that we never will."

"I reckon not. If they 're sharp enough to find this place, I'll give 'em my head an' welcome. They never think o' suspecting you, of course?"

"Oh, no! I'm a popular fellow with the people of the settlement. Besides, I was robbed a couple of times myself, you know. I intend to make myself agreeable for a long time to come, too. I will go into speculating pretty freely this fall, and that will keep off all suspicion. Meantime, whenever I learn of an opportunity for you to make a haul I will apprise you of it. If we are discreet, we can accumulate enough money in another year or two to make us all rich;

then we can settle down and act the gentleman for the remainder of our lives. Such is my plan."

Yes, such was Philip's programme for the future, and a very good arrangement it was, though destined never to reach its consummation, for "man proposes and God *disposes*."

"A good idee, captain," said Bill. "But I hope you won't think o' leavin' us as long as we keep the 'stablishment goin'?"

"Oh, no," returned Philip, with a show of that fidelity that exists even among thieves. "Oh, no! While the crowd hangs together I'll be one, but—"

"If them fellers ketch us," interrupted Bill, inclined to be witty, "we'll be apt to *hang together* in a peculiar sort o' way."

"So we might," said Philip, smiling; "but, as I was about to remark, when we think we have enough money to make us all comfortable, we can divide it fairly, and each man may set up in life as he may fancy. How much cash have we in the cave now?"

"Not less than twenty thousand. I think in two years we kin make it a hundred thousand."

"I hope so. In that time I can make ten thousand by speculating in grain and cattle. That will be a nice sum to add to the pile, you know, and I may as well be at work. Meanwhile I intend to have a gay time, Bill. They consider me a handsome young fellow in the settlement—"

"I don't wonder."

"—And I am always welcome to the social parties, dances, corn-huskings, sleighings, riding-excursions, and the like. Now, wouldn't it be a joke, Bill, if I were to take it into my head to get married in a year or two from now, and settle down in life?"

"I wouldn't be surprised if you did, captain; you're young yit, and I s'pose you'll have to have a taste o' mater-

onial life. But as for me, I think women is a bad institoo-tion. Beware of 'em, cap."

Oh, the villian! to entertain such ungenerous sentiments toward the ladies!

"Well, Bill," said Philip, "before I take my leave I wish to assure you that I will never dissolve partnership with you and the boys while you remain here. But," he resumed, after a pause, "strange as you may think it, I have serious thoughts sometimes, Bill. I occasionally think of marrying when I have sufficient capital—of settling quietly down on a farm somewhere, and of passing my remaining days in honesty. Such a proceeding, I think, would atone for my past misdeeds. Now, Bill, if I should marry in this settlement, who, do you suppose, would be the happy woman on whom I should bestow my name?"

"I have no idee, I'm sure; *I* do n't know anybody in the neighborhood."

"Then I'll tell you. It would be no other than the daughter of Henry White."

"Is it possible? That's kind o' romantic."

"Yes, strange as it may seem, she is the only girl in the settlement whom I would marry. She is handsome, intelligent, and industrious, and falls heir to a goodly amount of property. Besides, there is a fellow in the settlement whom I hate, and who, I am sure, loves this same girl; and I would marry her to rend his heart, if for nothing else. That fellow is no other than this same Roland, who is at the head of the party that is to hunt us to the earth. I believe he and I were born enemies. We hate each other, and we both know it, although no ill word has ever passed between us. He is a rather popular fellow in the settlement, too; but no more so than I am."

"He would git to be rather more so, if him and his gang was to find us all out," suggested Bill.

"Yes; but that must never be."

"It never *will*. But have you seen your gal lately?"

"No, not since I returned to the village. She has left the old homestead, and now resides with an uncle near the mountain. I will make it my business to call soon. I feel sure she will receive me with favor. Oh, if she knew.—But hark?"

The shrill notes of the whippoorwill were at this moment heard far below, and the sound echoed strangely against the bushes on the opposite side of the nook, as it arose. It was now nearly dark.

"Can the boys be back so soon?" whispered Philip.

"No, indeed, unless some accident has happened."

"Might this be a trap to catch us?"

"Should n't wonder. May be our signal has been found out, and some of them cusses, not knowin' exactly where we are, is callin' us to 'em."

"I scarcely know whether it would be expedient to answer. Hark! there it is again!"

The sharp cry of the whippoorwill again ascended from the quiet cove below.

"I think I'll answer it," said Bill.

"Do so," said Philip.

Bill placed a whistle to his lips, and uttered a sound similar to that which they had heard. It was responded to from below by three distinct notes.

"Ah, that's too well done for a green hand," said Bill.

"Yes, the boys must have returned for some reason," said Philip. "Let us go down and meet them; but first get a pair of pistols, lest we *should* meet enemies."

Having armed themselves, they proceeded to descend. When they reached the water at the base of the height, they found their four companions-in-crime sitting in the boat.

"Coast clear?" one of them asked.

"Yes, all right," replied Bill. "But what brings you back so soon?"

"We went twenty-four hours too soon."

"How do you make that out?" asked Bill.

"'Kase, when we had got across the river, and was about half-way to our place, we very sudden and onexpected remembered that to-day ain't to-morrer."

"Why, ain't to-day Tuesday?"

"Not unless Tuesday follers Sunday, which it don't if I have any sort o' recollection o' my schooldays," said Sam, who was acting as spokesman. "Now, Bill, don't you mind it was only yisterday you went to church like a good feller, in New Market?"

"So it was," said Bill. "I made the darndest mistake in the world. Sent you the wrong night. Never mind; to-morrer night's the night, an' I'll go myself. But say, I've got a visitor."

"Who?"

"Here he is, don't you see him?"

"Why, it's the captain! Hilloa, cap, glad to see you! How 've you been? When d'ye come?" And the party at once landed, made the boat fast, and greeted Philip Kirke.

"I am only on a short visit, and must soon be off," returned Philip. "So let us go up to the cave. Have you anything up there to drink, Bill?"

"Oh, yes; allus keep a little; so come on."

With this the whole party ascended to the cave.

"Looks like home, don't it?" remarked Bill, as he produced the stone jug.

"Yes, this is more like home to me than any place else," replied Philip, helping himself to a copious drink. "I only wish there were no unpleasant recollections connected with it."

"Oh, them things don't bother *me*, captain; and when you 're my age, they won't bother *you*. I remember when a triflin' thing like that *did* give me considerable bad feelins, and even kep' me from sleepin' good some nights; but that was when I had a darned nonsensical thing into me what they call *conscience*—a thing every fellow ort to git clear of

about as quick as he kin. It's a big drawback on success in life," said Bill, with something of the air of a philosopher.

"I believe you," returned Philip, who could not help thinking, at that moment, what a delightful thing it would be to get irrevocably and unreservedly rid of his own annoying conscience.

At length he took leave of his companions, and made his way through the dark woods toward the "Brownsville and Fairmont" road. After a somewhat trying walk through the gloomy forest, he emerged into the highway, and, more at ease, walked southward. In an hour he reached the mountain road, and turned toward the village.

As he passed the deserted house of Henry White, some unpleasant thoughts and strange feelings began to intrude themselves upon him. He almost dreaded to turn his eyes in the direction of the now gloomy house, lest he should see the murdered man beckoning to him from a window, or emerging from the dark wood beyond; although his better sense ridiculed such ideas. He breathed more freely when he had left the deserted farm-house several hundred yards behind, and with a lighter step approached the village.

It was nearly ten o'clock when he arrived upon the hill overlooking Weston. His mind was still fraught with uncomfortable thoughts, the result of passing Henry White's house, and he was just in front of the churchyard when he was startled by a loud scream, and looking in the direction, he caught a glimpse of a white figure near the center of the inclosure, while he heard the hasty footsteps of one whom he at first failed to see, approaching him; and then, looking more closely, he descried a dark form coming toward him as on the wings of the wind. While he stood rooted in his tracks with astonishment and fear, the board fence facing the road received a shock that made it rattle and quiver from end to end, and the approaching figure for a moment was unaccountably lost to view. While he still stood hesitating between amazement and terror, the strange figure again arose

to view, clearly described against the sky, emitted a piercing shriek, and fell with a dull sound into the road, but a few feet from him. Scarcely knowing what he did in his bewilderment, and trembling from head to foot with fright, Philip shrank back among the bushes at the roadside, almost touching the upright form of a man who stood concealed there, and, in his guilty fear, uttered the exclamation,

"Great heaven! is that the ghost of Henry White, come to judge me?"

The form of the man that stood beside him remained motionless and unseen.

As the reader will surmise, it was the fleeing form of Ned Stanton, frightened from the graveyard by Sallie Crane, that so terrified Philip Kirke; and the latter was dark figure No. 2 that darted into the bushes, as described in the preceding chapter; but who was the other—he that had concealed himself there a moment before, and stood by to hear his muttered words?

Beware, Philip Kirke! The avenger is now upon thy track! He is fiercer and more relentless than the bloodhound, and sooner or later he will overtake thee!

CHAPTER VII.

THE STOLEN HORSE.

Early on the ensuing morning, John Duffey and Will Hempstead, mounted on two spirited horses, crossed the river and started on their projected adventure.

"What is your plan, John?" asked Will, when they had traveled a little way.

"My plan is to go to the fellow who has the horse, and, pretending that I wish to buy or trade, ask to see him; then when he brings him out I will coolly mount him and ride off. The only point as to which I feel some hesitation is whether to knock Mr. Job Welles down or not."

"As to that," returned Will, "it will be well enough to do so provided you can; but judging from what I have heard of Welles, the man who attempts such a thing and fails, finds himself placed in a rather awkward position. However, there are two of us against him, and I don't presume he would come off more than second best in a contest for the horse."

"But," said John, thoughtfully, "there is another point in the case, of which I have not thought before; we have now two horses, and when we get mine, we'll have three on our hands. Now, it might be just a little difficult to manage three horses and fight Job Welles (and perhaps one or two of his crowd) at the same time."

"True," replied Will, "but can we not leave one with a farmer a mile or two this side of the place?"

"That is just what I was thinking of, and it is our only course. I'll leave this one I am riding, and you can accompany me on horseback to the house of Job Welles. When he brings out my pony, I'll jump on him, and we'll ride away."

"A very good arrangement," said Will. "But suppose he should not bring the pony out?"

"Ah, if he has him, he certainly *will;* for as he no doubt either stole the horse himself, or bought it at such a low price from the thief that he could not help knowing it was stolen, he will be very ready to dispose of it, if he can do so at all profitably. I do not think he will suspect me to be the owner; he never saw me before, though *I* saw *him.* He was in Weston one day about a year ago, got on a spree, and began to play the bully, not supposing we had anybody about the place who could fight. But it chanced that Ned

Stanton was in town that same day, and you may rest assured it was n't long till they got together."

"Then they had a fight? I think I do remember of hearing of it, though I did not know that Welles was the fellow."

"Yes, they had a fight, and a big one, too. They fought over about an acre of street in front of Tony Baily's, and the result was that Ned finally licked him so bad that he will probably never forget it as long as he lives, and, above all, will not be likely to visit Weston again. I, of course, was among the spectators, but I am sure he did not notice me; I do n't think he saw anybody that day whom he will remember, save Ned, and him he'll remember well."

"Ha, ha! Good for Ned! But did n't we scare him some last night?" exclaimed Will, as the graveyard scene of the previous evening recurred to his mind.

"Yes, for once Ned must give in that he was frightened. But it will never do for him to know that it was all a trick played on him by us. We must never divulge the fact to any one that it was Sallie Crane, and not a real ghost, whom Ned called forth from the grave. If he were to discover the trick he'd lick us worse than he did Job Welles."

"I wonder if the affair will make him a quieter fellow?"

"Scarcely," said John, who knew Ned Stanton best. "It may cool him down for a few months, but that is all. Bombast is a second nature to him, and he 'll never be anything else but the same noisy Ned Stanton."

Thus conversing, the young men rode on at an easy pace.

Their destination was a village known as Waynesburg. It was twenty miles from Weston, in the direction of Wheeling, and it was the direct road from Weston to Wheeling that led through Waynesburg. This road, about five miles from Weston, crossed a public road leading from New Market, a little village in Greene county, near the Virginia line, to Brownsville, Fayette county.

Waynesburg was the home of Job Welles, a notorious gambler, bully and horse-jockey. There were at that time a

great many such characters in the new settlements, so that it was often difficult to execute the civil law. It was not an unusual thing for the injured party to take the law in his own hands, and to obtain justice by a most summary proceeding, as did John Duffey on this occasion. It would have required a larger party than the two young men to go to Waynesburg and openly take a horse from Job Welles by force, as he was surrounded by a number of "lesser lights," who partook of his own nature, and who were ever ready to lend him assistance. It was, therefore, only by stratagem that our young friends could hope to succeed. Waynesburg was at that time freely acknowledged as the worst spot in the county for rowdy characters. There lived in that neighborhood a score or two of young and middle-aged men, of whom Job Welles was chief, who did little else than gamble, drink, carouse and trade horses and dogs. They were even suspected of worse things, but there was no direct evidence against them, and no one cared to incur their ill-will by making investigations concerning them, for they were really feared by the honest portion of the community.

"John," said Will, when the young men had arrived within a few miles of their destination, "do you know at what part of the village Job Welles lives?"

"No; but we can easily learn by inquiring; we'll stop at the tavern first and get dinner, you know."

"I know we can easily find his house, so far as that is concerned; but I was thinking that should it chance to be located beyond, we might meet with difficulty as we return through the village; for you know there is always a hard crowd about the place."

"I did not think of that before," replied John; "but then we ll be mounted, and need have no fear."

"But it would be very awkward to get a pistol-bullet sent into one of our horses, or one of ourselves, as we come flying through. Now, I would suggest, that if we learn on arriving at the village that Job's house is beyond, we at once make

up our minds to ride off with your horse in the direction of Wheeling, take the first byroad to the right or left, make a half-circuit of the village, and come into this road again. By that course we will not only escape some danger, but will mislead Welles and his friends as to our destination, in case they should pursue us. They will suppose we are making for Wheeling."

"Well said," responded John. "A good idea, and I think we will act upon it. However, it yet remains to be seen where the fellow's house *is* located. Should it be beyond the village, then let it be understood that we are to gallop off in the direction of Wheeling. Should it be on the right or left, we will take the road that leads us directly away from the village. You are aware that there is a road running through the place, and crossing this road?"

"Oh, yes; a road leading from New Market to Washington."

"Yes."

"Well, I think we have it all arranged. It is now time to leave one of the horses in the care of some one who lives near the road; it is not prudent to leave it too near the village, lest it should be heard of by some chance, before we return to claim it. Suppose we leave it at the first house?"

"It *will* be best, I think," agreed Duffey.

They soon came within sight of a farmer's house, near which a narrow country road turned from the main one to the right.

"We may chance to come out on this road, in case we find it necessary to take a roundabout course," suggested Will.

"We may; and it will be convenient to have the extra horse near. I wonder where it leads to?"

"I don't know. Probably across the country till it intersects some more public road."

"No doubt. I think we can easily reach it, though we may be obliged to ride a long distance around."

John now dismounted and walked forward, while Will,

taking the bridle-rein, led the horse up a little lane to the farm-house. The farmer readily agreed to take care of the superfluous horse till he should return for it, and Will rode on again, and was soon with his companion.

They reached the village at about twelve o'clock, and proceeded at once to a tavern, where their horse was fed and their dinners served. It was no unusual thing in those days to see two men traveling with but one horse between them, walking and riding alternately; so they excited no curiosity or wonder at the inn. Dinner over, they began to hint at finding another horse, and asked the landlord whether there were any horse-dealers in the vicinity. The latter named several persons who dealt in horse-flesh—a Mr. Job Welles among the rest. He also pointed out their residences—that of Welles being an ordinary old-fashioned stone house, about three hundred yards from the immediate village, and on the Wheeling road. Duffey and his friend thereupon took their horse, paid their bill, and proceeded at once to the residence of J. Welles, Esquire.

On arriving in front of the house they were greeted by five unreasonably large dogs, who barked savagely, and looked altogether as though they might be in the habit of dining on a man or two, or a horse, or something of that sort. Their barking soon brought the master out, whom John at once recognized, though it was evident that the two young men were strangers to *him*.

He was an ill-looking fellow, of thirty-five. His face was covered with a beard of about two weeks' growth, and his hatless head with short, stiff, reddish hair. He was not more than five feet six inches in height, but rather heavy, and evidently very strong. He had a short, thick neck, heavy square shoulders, large muscular limbs, and enormous hands. When he spoke his voice harmonized delightfully with his appearance.

"What do you want?" he gruffly asked, which was his gentlest and most polite manner of inquiring one's pleasure.

"My friend and I are traveling," replied Duffey, "and we have but one horse between us. We had two when we started from Baltimore, but one of them died coming over the mountains. As it is awkward and unhandy riding turn about, we have come to the conclusion either to buy another, or sell the one we have, and both foot it. I was told that you dealt in horses."

"So I do. I'm allus in for a buy, sell, or a swap. Which way are you goin'?"

"Toward Wheeling," replied John; which was no falsehood, for they certainly expected to go in that direction for a short distance.

"Well," said Job, thinking this a good opportunity to get rid of the stolen horse he had, and at the same time to send it where its owner would probably never see it, "I've got as purty a hoss as you ever seed, an' I'll sell him reasonable. He's a good hoss, and I raly do n't like to part with him; but he's one more than I want, an' I haint had him long; I only bought him to 'commodate a friend o' mine that needed money. D'ye like to see him?"

"Why," returned Duffey, hesitatingly, "you might bring him out; though I'm afraid he'll cost more than I can afford to pay."

"Wait a minute, an' I'll bring him out. I'll put a saddle on, an' you kin try how he moves," said Welles, leaving our friends and walking to his stable near by.

"Now, Will," said John, when he had left them, "if it is my horse he leads out you'll recognize him, wont you?"

"Oh, yes; I know him almost as well as yourself."

"Then remain in your saddle, and when I get my horse by the bridle I'll mount him, and we'll away toward Wheeling."

"I'll be ready."

"You have your pistols with you, have you?"

"Yes, and my loaded riding-whip too, if it comes to that."

"Good! I think we would be enough for a dozen of Job's crowd, should they chance to be near, or to pursue and over-

take us. When I mount, ride near and hand me your whip, I'll show you something delightful. Your horse will go without it, I suppose."

"Oh, yes; I can make him dart away, when the time comes."

"Very well. There he comes. My horse, as I live!"

"Yes; I see that at a glance."

Welles now emerged from the stable, leading a beautiful chestnut-colored pony, saddled and bridled.

"He *is* a nice animal," remarked Duffey, as Welles led the pony out upon the road. "Now, how much would you think of asking for him?"

"Why," replied Welles, with some hesitation, "the fact is, I paid a hundred dollars for him myself; but as I don't want to keep him, and as I made a good trade or two yesterday, I'll take ninety for him."

"No less than that?" asked Duffey.

"Why, he's cheap at that! Jis' git on him, an' take a canter out the road, an' if you don't say he's cheap at ninety, I'll give him to you for nothin'."

"That I think you had better do," said Duffey, coolly, as he mounted, "for it's a stolen horse anyhow."

"You're a liar!" shouted Welles, his suspicions aroused in a moment; and as it flashed upon him how easily the strangers might ride away, and he on foot and unable to pursue, he sprang forward and grasped the bridle-rein.

But at that moment Duffey seized his companion's riding-whip, and with the loaded end dealt the rascal's hand a crushing blow, that at once released the bridle-rein from his grasp. Then, reversing the whip, he gave him a fierce cut across the face with the lash, touched his pony, and darted away with the swiftness of the wind, followed closely by Will, at the same time shouting:

"Hurrah for Job Welles, the rascal! Ho for Wheeling! Hurrah!"

The duped ruffian, with a volley of bitter curses, hastily

drew a pistol from his pocket and fired after the receding equestrians, but without effect; then rushed like mad to his stable to prepare his best horse for pursuit. But his hand was so injured by the blow from the whip, that he could scarcely use it, and he found it extremely difficult to saddle and bridle a horse with one hand. The horse, too, which was a little playful at times, was averse to receiving the bit in his mouth at once, preferring to have a little sport over the affair before admitting it between his teeth; and so Job, unlike the ancient gentleman whose name he bore, fell to cursing and swearing in his impatience and rage, and finally to beating the animal with a rake-handle, which was only wasting time. It was all of a quarter of an hour before he was in the saddle, and then remembering that should he go alone he would have two to deal with, he rode quickly to the village, and collected five or six of his companions, who at once saddled their horses and joined him. Thus another quarter of an hour slipped away, and by that time the fugitives had probably traveled six miles. However, when all were ready, they rode off at a rapid pace, all well mounted, and in good spirits at the prospect of a safe adventure.

"I know we kin ketch 'em afore they git to Wheelin'," said the illiterate Job, with an oath.

"Are they goin' there?" asked one.

"Yes, I heerd 'em say so. Thunder, but my hand hurts! Oh, that cuss! I'll pound him into a jelly when we ketch 'em!" said Job, savagely. And he fell to cursing and swearing to beguile time, as they went careering along.

As, at present, we have nothing further to do with this interesting party, we will briefly follow them to the conclusion of their adventure, and leave them. They traveled that afternoon a matter of twenty-five miles, directly toward Wheeling, it never occurring to them that the fugitives had left that road by the first transverse by-road. Late that night they returned from their wild-goose chase in no very amiable humor; which latter remark applies more especially

to Job, who had lost a horse for which he had paid the thief thirty dollars, and who had a most painful hand by which to remember the affair, to say nothing of its being likely to render him unfit for any active service in a rough-and-tumble fight for six months to come.

Duffey and his friend, after leaving Mr. Welles so unceremoniously, and with such an unaffectionate farewell, rode about five miles out the Wheeling road ere they reached any avenue by which to change their course. Here they turned to the right upon a by-road that was so little used as to be overgrown with grass; and after a circuit of fifteen miles, they emerged into the Weston road, four miles from Waynesburg, finding themselves near the farm-house at which they had left one of their horses in the morning. It was now nearly five o'clock. While John rode slowly in the direction of Weston, Will proceeded to the farm-house for the extra horse. The farmer at once recognized him, and returned the animal, refusing to receive any pay for his kindness. Will then bade him good-day, rode away, and soon joined his companion. He then mounted the fresh horse, and led the other by the rein.

As the animals had all been unusually exercised that day, and as there was no probable danger of pursuit, the adventurers allowed them to take their way at a leisurely pace, and it was nine o'clock, and the night rather dark, when they found themselves crossing the New Market and Brownsville road, five miles from Weston.

Just here they were startled by a cry of "Murder! Help!" issuing from a wood immediately on their left, through which the transverse road lay.

"Hark!" exclaimed John. "There's something wrong, Will, and we must see to it." And springing from his horse, he tied the extra animal (which he was at that time leading) to a sapling, and quickly remounting, dashed down the road in the direction of the cry, followed by his comrade.

They had not gone fifty paces, when they arrived upon the

scene of a desperate struggle between a traveler and three robbers. It was very dark, but they clearly saw the nature of the case, and John, drawing a pistol, fired over the heads of the struggling parties, which he intended should have the effect of frightening away the villains. Two of them did run away through the dark shades of the wood, but the third, more bold than the others, stood his ground, and drawing a pistol, fired at the intruders. The ball whistled past the ear of Duffey, and the ruffian sprang forward with a knife in his hand, as was afterward ascertained, and the result might have been serious to Duffey, but at that critical moment Will dashed up and dealt the villain a blow upon the head with the butt of his riding-whip, that felled him senseless to the earth. Then, lest the others should return, he shouted in a loud voice,

"Pursue the others! They 're in the wood!"

If the rascals still lurked about, this would convince them that a large party was in pursuit, and thus effectually frighten them away.

"Whom have we here?" asked Duffey.

"Are you friends?" asked the traveler, who had been knocked down by the robbers a moment before, now arising to his feet.

"Yes. Have you been robbed?"

"No, my money is still safe; but in another minute it would have been gone, and my life too, had you not come to my rescue."

"Did those rascals waylay you?" asked Will.

"Yes. I am on my way to Brownsville, and I have a sum of money with me. I was riding slowly along here a few minutes ago, when my horse suddenly received a blow that was no doubt intended for me, and as he started he was seized and held by some one, while two others dragged me from the saddle. I resisted and called for help, though hopelessly enough I thought, and the thief that had seized my horse now let go, and the three attacked me. One struck me

with a heavy weapon, and felled me to the ground just as you rode up. Ha! You've knocked one of them, have you?" said the traveler, for the first time perceiving the form of the stunned robber lying near him.

"Yes," replied Duffey; "and we had better tie him before he comes to. What shall we do it with?"

"One of the extra bridle-reins," suggested Will.

"The very thing," said Duffey. "There are two reins to my bridle, and I'll take one off and tie the fellow's wrists together." And dismounting from his horse, he soon put this plan into execution.

"Well, my friends," said the grateful traveler, "you are strangers to me, but you have rendered me an invaluable service, and not without danger to yourselves. I have three thousand dollars here; you're welcome to it. Take it! You've saved my life, and—"

"We want no reward for it," interrupted Duffey.

"No, indeed," added Will.

"Who are you?" asked the stranger.

"Our names are Will Hempstead and John Duffey. We live at Weston. We are glad to have been able to do any one such a service. We wish no reward for doing a duty which no one but a coward would shrink from. In saving you from these rascals, and especially in capturing one of them, we feel as much pleasure as you do in escaping them. But where is your horse? You were riding, I believe?"

"He ran off toward Brownsville, but he will not go far. Listen! I hear him now."

The neigh of a horse at this moment echoed through the lonely wood.

"I'll soon bring him to you," said Duffey, mounting his pony. "Will, remain till I return." And he rode off in the direction of the sound.

In five minutes he returned with the stranger's horse.

"Will you proceed on your journey?" he asked.

"I am not much hurt," returned the traveler, "and I think

I will. I can never thank you sufficiently for the service you have rendered me this night. My name is Ross; I am a merchant of New Market. Whenever you come to our town, call and see me. If I can ever serve you in any way I shall gladly do so, though I should sacrifice all I possess in the world. I will never forget your brave conduct."

"Come, no thanks. We are already sufficiently rewarded by knowing that we have served you."

"Then good-by. Don't forget my name, and don't forget that you will be doing me an additional favor by calling on me and making yourself at home in my house, whenever you come to New Market. Remember, it will always be a pleasure to me to see you. So, again, good-by." And the traveler mounted his horse, and rode slowly away.

"Good-by! Good-by! And a safe journey."

"Will," said Duffey, "I am pleased with this adventure."

"And I," returned Will. "I would not have missed it for the world. That man's gratitude is better than a thousand fortunes. *I'd* rather have it."

"We've made a warm friend of him. But how will we manage this fellow?"

"I'll carry him in front of me on my horse," returned Will, who was the stronger of the two. "The villain! He'll not get away from me. Just help me to get him up, will you."

The still insensible form of the robber was lifted to the back of Will's horse. He soon partially recovered his consciousness, and was able to sit upon the back of the animal, supported by Will. Duffey then mounted his horse, and they rode from the wood into the Weston road, where the other horse was still safe. John loosed him, and leading him by the bridle-rein as before, rode toward Weston, accompanied by Will and his prisoner.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CAPTIVE OUTLAW.

On the evening of the ghost affair in the churchyard, it was not until Ned Stanton had been resuscitated and the whole party moved off toward the village, that Philip Kirke emerged from his hiding place among the bushes.

"This is strange," he muttered. "I can't make it out. What brought that fellow Stanton out here to the churchyard at this time of night? And who could that have been in white, that seemed to frighten him so? It must have been some trick. I'll overtake the party and learn all about it." And he walked toward the village at a rapid pace.

"Yes, very strange," muttered another, stepping out upon the road when Philip had gone. "Very strange, the whole affair—especially those words of your's, Philip Kirke. I can't make *them* out, at all. Certainly they were not intended for *my* ears; they burst from him in his fright, when he little imagined who was standing beside him. I would not have him suspect that I heard them; so I will return home. No one will know that I have been here to-night. I feel curious to know the meaning of that scene in the churchyard; but I'll learn that soon enough. I heard John Duffey's voice among those who followed Ned out here, and that is pretty clear evidence that the noisy fellow has been the victim of some trick. I'll go to Weston to-morrow night; then I'll know all about it." And he turned and walked away in the direction of the mountain.

"Hilloa, boys! What's up? Where have you been?" asked Philip Kirke, on coming up with the party.

"Hilloa, Phil! That you?" said Tony.

"Yes. What does it mean to see you fellows out here at this time of night? Not been at anybody's melon-patch, I hope?" said Philip, who feigned total ignorance of what he had seen.

"Oh, no; but we've seen a little fun. Ned Stanton has just been treated to the biggest scare he ever had in his life."

"Ned Stanton! Where? How? *He* is not here!"

"No," replied Tony, "he is not here now. But I'll tell you all about it. Ned, Dick, John, and Will were in the bar-room this evening talking about ghosts, when Ned, as usual, boasted that he did n't fear anything in the wide world, and least of all, ghosts. Moreover, he said he did n't believe there were such things, and that he thought a graveyard as comfortable and agreeable a place to lie down and take a nap of a pleasant night as any other spot, and, if any difference, a little to be preferred over all other places. By and by John bantered him to go into the graveyard, and cry out, 'Come to judgment!' and away Ned started, while we followed to see if he would n't back out by the time he should reach the gate. But no, open went the gate, in went Ned, and up onto a grave he got, and commenced to bawl out; when, strange enough, a ghost *did* appear, though where it came from, unless out of the ground, I can't tell, for there was nothing to be seen when Ned first entered the gate. It must have come at his bidding, as it arose directly up at his feet, and stood beside him; and the way he let a yell out of him, and the way he got out o' that, was worth a treat, I assure you. He made a rush for the gate, but missed it and fell over the fence; and we really thought at first that he had broken his neck, for he lay still as death for several minutes before he came to. When he did, he got up with an oath or two, and then made for the village. We started with him, but had not gone far when he began to think our company was not agreeable, and he broke away for town like a racer. I suppose he has gone to get his horse, which is

hitched to my sign-post, and go home. I reckon he won't come to town again for a month."

"But what became of the ghost?" asked Philip, with some concern.

"That is as much a mystery as where it came from," replied Tony; "for the next time I looked that way, after seeing Ned get over the fence, it had vanished."

"Very singular," remarked Philip, "unless it's a trick some of you have played on him."

"I'll swear *I* know nothing of it," said John.

"Nor I," said Will Hempstead.

"Nor I," said Tony.

"If any fellow," said Dick, speaking for the first time, "*has* played a trick on him, and he finds it out, I wouldn't be in that fellow's boots for—for—" And Dick said no more. He couldn't think of any thing of sufficient value to induce him to be in "that fellow's boots."

"One certainly would run a risk by playing a trick on Ned," said John. "*I* shouldn't like to try it. But, I say, Tony, he didn't earn the whisky, did he?"

"Why not?"

"Because, you know, the agreement provided that he was to call out, 'Come to judgment!' *three times;* and you know very well he only did it once till the ghost appeared and he ran away."

"True," said Tony, "he didn't win the whisky. By the way, Phil.," he said, addressing Philip, "you were not home for supper; I hope you have not gone without."

"No fear of that," replied Philip; "I have been at old Danny Patton's. I bought some wheat and rye of him, and nothing would do but I must stay for supper. I have walked along leisurely since I left his house, which was a couple of hours ago. What time is it now?"

"About ten o'clock," replied Tony.

"So late?"

"Yes. It is a wonder you were not afraid to be out so late, on account of the robbers."

"Well, I did n't feel quite easy when I thought of them, I confess; but they did not occur to my mind till about fifteen minutes ago, since which I have walked quite briskly. I am sorry I did not reach the graveyard in time to see the ghost."

"If you had you would have seen Ned frightened for once."

When they reached the village, all went to Tony Baily's, a "smile" went round, and they dispersed.

"I've heard where my horse is, Tony," said Duffey, as he and Will left the bar-room.

"Have you? That's lucky, if you can only recover him," said Tony.

"That I will do to-morrow, or have a fight," returned John. "Will and I are going after him."

"What horse does he speak of?" asked Philip, when he and Tony were alone, Dick having already gone.

"A beautiful pony which his father gave him. It was stolen from him some time ago, and he has searched the whole country over in vain. I suppose he has at last learned where it is."

"And will he go forthwith and take it, or does he expect to recover it by legal proceedings?"

"I think he and Will intend to go and take it without ceremony; and whoever has it will be lucky if he don't get a thrashing."

Philip retired, and Tony "closed" for the night.

Next day, while John and Will were absent on their adventure, which is described in the preceding chapter, everything was quiet in the village. When the evening came, and supper was over at the village tavern, Philip wandered forth, and again cautiously visited the rendezvous, where he found Sam and Joe "keeping house," and learned that Bill and those affectionate brothers, the "Busters," had started for

the New Market and Brownsville road, for the purpose of waylaying and robbing the traveler.

When he returned to the village, quite a number of persons were assembled at Tony's, awaiting the return of Duffey and his friend, in some anxiety to learn the result of their adventure; for it had become known, in the course of the day, that the young men had gone to Waynesburg to recover the stolen horse, that the unscrupulous Job Welles was the man with whom they had to deal, and some fears were felt for their safety. It was well known that the notorious Job and his "crowd" entertained no friendly feelings for the young men of Weston; and that should John and Will be recognized while there, their lives would scarcely be safe. Nearly all the young men of the village, and half a dozen from the surrounding country (among them George Roland), were collected in Tony's bar-room. Philip joined them for a little while, but soon took a light and retired to his room. He had but closed the door behind him when he heard a shout in the street, and a commotion in the bar-room below, as of all rushing to the door. Going to his window, and looking down upon the street, he saw two men ride up, whom he had no difficulty in recognizing as John Duffey and Will Hempstead. But it must be confessed that he was rather induced to start back in dismay, as he perceived, by the light of a lantern which Tony carried out and hung up by the door, that one of the brave boys held as a prisoner the burly form of his lieutenant, Bill Hardin, who was the very gentleman they had captured on rescuing the traveler. He had entirely recovered his consciousness, and was now able to curse and swear in a style that did him great credit as a thorough ruffian. He was held firmly upon the back of the horse by the strong arms of Will, who sat behind him; his hands were bound together with a bridle-rein, and there was a delicious contusion near his temple, where something shaped very like the butt of a whip had struck him.

"Whom have you there?" asked several.

"A rascal, whom we caught attempting, with several others, to rob and murder a traveler at the cross-roads, five miles from here."

"It's a lie!" said Bill. "I'm a traveler myself, and—"

"Then why did you fire at us when we rode up?"

"I did n't; it was—"

"Do n't lie; you know you did."

"No, by—"

"No words," interrupted several voices from the crowd! "Hang him! He's, no doubt, one of the robbers who have been harassing the settlement for the last two years."

"And probably helped to murder Henry White," suggested George Roland.

Philip almost reeled to the floor as he heard this. He trembled in every limb, the perspiration started from every pore, and he scarcely knew whether his heart was about to stand still for ever, or spring from his throat. He chanced to have a flask of brandy in his room, and from that he took a hearty drink, which soon served to restore his nerves to comparative quiet. Knowing that it would be expected of him to make his appearance, he left his room, locked his door, and went below, meditating on the probable consequences in case Bill should show any sign of recognition.

"What's the matter?" he inquired of Tony, whom he met in the bar-room.

"The boys have returned with the horse, and brought with them a robber, whom they captured on the road."

"Ah! who? How—"

At this moment the clamor without rose to the highest pitch.

"Kill the rascal, if he don't tell!" shouted one.

"Hang him right up, the scoundrel! No doubt he is the murderer himself!" cried another, excitedly.

"I tell ye I don't know nothin' about no sich murder!" protested Bill, now really terrified. "I never know'd no such

a man as Henry White! I don't know where he lived! I never heer'd o' him!"

"The lying rascal!" "Make him tell, or kill him!" "Shoot him!" "Knock him on the head!" "Hang him up to the sign-post!" were the exclamations of the excited crowd; and if ever Bill's life was in danger it was then.

"Haint I got no right to no trial?" he said, piteously.

"No! no! Poor Henry White, whom you or some of your cursed gang murdered, had no trial, and he had done no wrong. No! You cut him right off, without warning, and even hid his body from his heart-broken friends. Away with the villain! To the sign-post with him! A halter! A halter!"

Philip was now standing in the doorway surveying the terrible scene, upon which the light of the lantern dimly shone. It made his heart quail. He saw Bill struggling desperately, but hopelessly, in the hands of several of the maddened crowd—his face ashy pale, his eyes starting, his lips covered with white froth, the blood trickling from his wound, his clothes torn to shreds and covered with dirt, his hat gone, his hair disordered, and, withal, a look of such mortal terror upon his coarse face that it almost chilled the blood in his heart to look upon him.

One of the mob now appeared, carrying a "clothes-line" in his hand, for obvious purposes, and he proceeded to form, at one end, a scientific slip-noose.

"Who 'll climb up and put this rope over the top of the sign-post?" he asked.

"Mercy!" gasped Bill, now completely overpowered and thoroughly terrified. "Mercy! Spare me! Oh spare me!" and he fell upon his knees in the most agonizing supplication.

There was a moment of hesitation.

"Will you tell us the truth then?" asked several.

"Yes! yes! I swear I will! by all—"

"Don't add perjury to your other crimes," said one.

"You'd better do what you never did before—say your prayers."

"But I aint a murderer! indeed I aint? I *have* stole, but—"

"Then you *are* one of the robbers who have been preying upon us so long! Tell us where to find the rest of your blackguard associates, or you die!"

"They aint no place. There was two fellers with me, but I s'pose they're run away to Pittsburg, where we come from. I'm tellin' the truth, gentlemen, upon my soul I am," said Bill, with more eloquence and energy of voice than he had ever before brought into play.

"Boys," spoke George Roland, at this moment, "let us keep the fellow till to-morrow, and, in the meantime, notify the civil authorities. They may be able to elicit more information from him in regard to the rest of the robbers. If we hang him now, as he no doubt deserves, without getting any further disclosures from him as to his companions, we are no nearer rid of the annoyance than before. At least, give him till to-morrow to tell what I am pretty sure he knows."

"What will we do with him? Where can we keep him?" was asked.

"You can put him in one of my empty rooms for to-night," said Tony, "and set a watch over him, to see that he does not escape."

"My friends," said Philip Kirke, addressing the mob for the first time, "I think the advice is good, and you would do well to act upon it. In executing the fellow now, although he may deserve it at the hands of the law, we have his blood on our heads to carry through our lives. Moreover, he may not be guilty of anything further than robbery. Once in the hands of the authorities, he will not be likely to escape justice; and they understand better than we how to extort information from him concerning his companions, who infest this neighborhood. Thus we may be enabled at last to break up their den and capture them all."

The excitement of the mob had slightly abated by this time, and there was a moment of silence and hesitation.

"Phil is right, I think, boys," said Tony, addressing the crowd. "By following your impulses, while excited as you are now, you run great risk of committing a blunder, of which you may repent when it is too late. You had better shut him up for to-night with a guard over him."

"Put the matter to vote," suggested one.

"Ay, that's the way to decide it," agreed several.

"Very well, here goes," said one, who was most clamorous for Bill's immediate execution. "All those in favor of hanging this sneaking, cowardly villain right off, will please express their views to that effect by holding their hats above their heads—and let's see a cloud of 'em."

A number of hats arose above the heads of the crowd, like dark demons coming from the regions below, to carry the terror-stricken robber away. The acting president then slowly counted the votes:

"One, two, three, four, five"—every word pierced like a dagger to the wretched man's heart—"six, seven, eight"—oh, how many more!—"nine, ten—eleven!"

No more. A moment of silence.

"That will do."

Eleven of the crowd had voted that the man should die.

"Those in favor of locking the rascal up till morning will signify their wishes in the same manner."

Again a number of hats arose before Bill's swimming vision. He could hear the sound of a voice counting the votes in favor of granting him a respite; but his heart fluttered, his brain throbbed so, that he could not tell one word from another, until, as the voice ceased, he heard the word "fourteen," and he fell to the ground in a swoon.

"He's fainted," said one.

"Throw a bucketful o' water over his face,' suggested another.

"Pour a quart o' whisky down his throat," was the mild suggestion of a third.

"Tony," said Philip, "give the fellow some brandy; that will bring him to."

Brandy was applied, and Bill soon opened his eyes, and expressed a desire to learn what part of the globe he at that time had the honor to occupy. He was informed that he was in Weston, and that the citizens of that place had just decided, by a vote of fourteen against eleven, not to hang him till next day.

He was then conducted—still trembling from the excitement and terror occasioned by the scenes through which he had passed—to a room on the second floor of Tony's two-story house. The door was locked upon him, and a watchman posted in the passage, to be relieved in an hour or two by another. One was also posted beneath the window of the room in which the culprit was confined. George Roland took the first watch beneath the window, and Philip very kindly (?) consented to watch for the first hour by the room-door, and at once took his position there. As no one felt like sleeping on so important an occasion, the crowd, except the two sentinels, re-assembled in the bar-room, and did a little for the cause of intemperance.

After the lapse of twenty minutes, Philip executed a scarcely-audible rap on the prisoner's door; after which he placed his lips to the key-hole, and, in a soft whisper, called out—

"BILL!"

There was no reply. All was quiet. He was beginning to think the prisoner had fallen asleep, or that he had swooned again, when he heard a slight scratch upon the door. It was evidently produced by William's finger-nails, he having noiselessly approached the door.

"Bill," called out Philip, again.

"Who is there?" came from within.

"The Cap. Courage, Bill; but caution. I'm on watch

now. I'll be relieved in an hour. Then I'll go straight to the cave, and bring the boys to your rescue. Don't fall asleep. Watch constantly for them. They will approach and knock down the guard under your window. Then jump out and run for it. Do you understand?"

"Yes."

"Then no more. It is not safe to talk. But depend on me, and remember what you are to do."

"I will."

And all was quiet again.

It was after twelve o'clock when Philip was relieved from his post. No time was to be lost. He immediately joined the crowd in the bar-room, and soon after slipped away, confident that his absence would not be observed. Once clear of the village, he sped away, as fast as feet could carry him. He was, of course, forced to slacken his pace in some degree long ere he reached the cave; but, altogether, he made excellent time, arriving at his destination in a little more than an hour and a quarter, which, considering that a mile of his route lay through dark and pathless woods, was a physical feat that in a better cause would have done him credit.

He found Sam, Joe, and the two brothers wide awake, and very fearful lest Bill had fallen into the hands of the authorities, and to save himself from punishment, revealed their place of rendezvous. Philip, in the fewest possible words, explained their worthy comrade's situation, and described the manner in which he was held in durance. Then he told them that they must all immediately go to the village, well armed, creep stealthily up, knock down the sentinel beneath the window, and that, when Bill should jump down and run for it, they must, if necessary, cover his retreat, as he was probably weak from his wounds. He urged, however, that the rescue should be conducted without noise, and without violence, save in the case of the watchman, who must needs be knocked senseless.

The four culprits accompanied Philip to within a few hun-

dred yards of the village, where he left them, with instructions to come up in a quarter of an hour, stating that, of course, they could expect no assistance from him. He then entered the quiet village, and approached the tavern, where he discovered, to his satisfaction, that the crowd and the excitement were as great as when he left, and that all had been indulging pretty freely in Tony's "old rye." He was soon among them, and it was very clear that he had not been missed. It was now about four o'clock, and another hour would bring the early light of day.

By and by Philip invited all to take a drink at his expense, which they did with pleasure. Several "treats" followed, and the time passed even merrily away.

All were busy discussing the question as to how to dispose of the prisoner when the morning should come; and as all were more or less excited by drink, there was a clear majority in favor of bringing him forth, extorting from him, by threats of lynching, all the information possible, and then of lynching him after all. Thus an hour went by, and Philip began to feel sure that his men had either done their work well, or had failed to attempt it.

The early gray of morning, mingled with a thick fog from the river, was just beginning to thrust aside the dark curtains of that eventful night, when the young farmer, who had, more than an hour before, taken his post as watchman beneath the window, came staggering into the bar-room, to the astonishment of all, pale, trembling, and covered with blood and dust.

"What's the matter?" exclaimed all in a breath, springing to their feet.

The young man sank into a chair, and, speaking with some difficulty, replied:

"I was knocked down by some one—I do n't know how long ago, as I have been insensible—and I fear that rascal has escaped. Go, quick and see!"

Some of the crowd rushed up stairs, while others hurried out to where the guard had been assaulted.

The sentinel at the door of the captive's room was still at his post, and confident that all was right. The key was brought up, the door was opened, and, by the early light of the morning, the self-appointed administrators of justice perceived, to their chagrin, that—*their prisoner had escaped.*

CHAPTER IX.

IRA TATE.

Golden October! How beautiful the forests are now! The leaves have just turned yellow at Jack Frost's earliest touch; and, as ever and anon a fitful breeze gently stirs the branches, the faded leaves descend in showers, rustling more merrily than ever, still proud of the honor of having clothed the kingly forest with its past summer's glory. It is pleasant to stroll through the woods—to clamber over the mountain rocks or the decaying prostrate trees—now veiled in clouds of falling leaves, now treading deep among the crisp ones already fallen—to see the nimble squirrel, just in its glory, running up and down the tall trees, or hopping about among the bushes in quest of hickory-nuts—occasionally stopping suddenly, and standing half-erect, to listen to some forest sound that has reached its quick ear.

A month has passed away since the night on which the captured robber escaped from Weston. Since then no tidings have been heard of him at the village; all search has proved futile; theft has been progressing as before; the unknown robbers have not been seen, but their presence has been felt, and everything is going on as usual.

We have nothing to do with the village to-day. We must turn away from the Monongahela, that smoothly as ever follows its winding way among the picturesque hills, on its everlasting journey to the ocean—always going, always arriving, but never there. We go toward the mountain, where heaps of moss-grown rocks and endless forests of trees can be seen towering among the clouds, overlooking the many cleared farms and extensive woodlands of the lower country.

We take the mountain road at the village, and on our way we pass the wonted rural scenes of autumn. We see the farmer's boy in the orchard, gathering the solid apples for winter use; we see the cider press surrounded by the farmer, his sons, and a neighbor or two, busily pressing off the juice of the earlier fruit of the orchard; we see the farmer, with his hired help, in the faded cornfield, "cutting up" the tall stalks, "topping" or "blading" for fodder, or husking the ears "from the stalk," and throwing them in heaps at convenient intervals along the rows, to be gathered up and hauled to the barn or corn-crib; as we pass the big log-barn on the right or left, we hear the steady knock, knock, knock of the flail upon the thrashing-floor; occasionally we see a group of boys gathering chestnuts or hickory-nuts, one of their number perched among the branches of a tall tree, striking energetically about him with a pole, causing the nuts to descend in showers to the ground, where the others gather them up and put them in baskets.

On we go, passing these varied scenes one after another, till we stand by the mountain. Here let us stop; we have reached the last farm-house. A well-cultivated farm, of several hundred acres, lies in a fertile valley at the foot of the mountain. It is the property of Ira Tate, Mary White's singular old uncle. The farm-house, surrounded by the usual stable, barn, corn-crib, etc., stands a little way from the road. It is a large, old-fashioned, two-story log building. The exterior is rough and unattractive, and does not speak very eloquently of the architect; but the interior is neat and

clean from the cellar to the garret, and speaks highly of the occupants.

Ira is at work in the barn to-day. The thrashing-floor is nearly covered with even rows of wheat-sheaves, and the busy flail, in the hands of the irritable man, is knocking and pounding the bearded heads, making the grains and chaff fly at every stroke. Let us enter; we have not seen that remarkable man before.

There stands the quick-tempered and impulsive Ira Tate, a man of some five-and-fifty years. He possesses a large and muscular frame; his head is very round; his hair is as stiff as the beards of the wheat he is thrashing, its color is a savage iron-gray, and it grows down to within just one inch of his eyebrows; his eyes, which are of a dark gray, are rather small, but always wide open; his nose is a short one, and rather of the pug persuasion; his mouth is small, and the lips of the average thickness; his chin, smooth-shaven like the rest of his ash-colored face, is a perfect model of a round chin, neither protruding nor retreating. He is dressed as farmers usually are while about their customary labors. His trowsers of domestic material have a patch, neatly executed, on each knee; his old black wool hat, his linsey warmus and jacket, are thrown off, and the sleeves of his red flannel shirt rolled up to the elbows, displaying a pair of huge arms, to which the muscles cling in great knots and bunches.

While he is working away right lustily, the form of a man appears in the wide doorway of the barn. Ira arrests the downward stroke of the flail midway, and looks up. The intruder is an entire stranger to him; he has never seen him before, that is clear. But we, reader, are quite familiar with him; it is Philip Kirke.

"Good morning," says Philip, politely. "Mr. Tate, I presume?"

"That's my name," is the brief reply; and Ira stands staring at the stranger, as though he expects him in the next

moment to say something insulting or provoking, that he may rush upon him and hurl him from the barn.

Philip is civil, however, and intends to remain so while in the presence of this man; for he has not forgotten the graphic account of his singular disposition, which he heard from Tony Baily several months ago.

"My name is Kirke," he says, after a pause; "I deal in grain and cattle now and then; you have probably heard of me."

"Oh, yes; I'm glad to see you. I've heard my niece speak of you—Mary, you know—Henry White's daughter."

"I know her quite well," replies Philip. "I am glad she has not forgotten me. I have frequently visited her father's house previous to his strange disappearance, and was always treated with great kindness. I hope Miss Mary is quite well."

"Yes, quite well now; but not so lively as she used to be, poor girl. In time, though, I hope she will be herself again."

"I am sure she will," says Philip. "The young and sprightly are more apt to forget their sorrows through time, than to die of them. It is very foolish to repine for what is past. Our departed friends, could they communicate with us, would never ask us to be so passionate in our remembrance of them as to wear our lives away by useless fretting. Mary is a girl of good sense, however, and I am sure she will not allow sorrow for a past bereavement to take away all future enjoyment of life."

"That's a fact," agrees Ira; and he plies his flail again.

"This is nice, lively work," remarks Philip. "I'll try *my* hand at it." And by way of making himself quite friendly with Mary's uncle, and agreeable beyond all precedent, he takes up an extra pair of flails, and goes to work opposite the farmer.

For half a minute there is a rapid succession of thumps on the thrashing-floor, that must sound quite stirring to any one

without, if there be any one listening. But presently Philip's flail, which he handles just a little clumsily, comes in contact with that of Ira in mid-air, causing it to whirl round and strike the latter a neat blow above the eye. Ira drops his flail like one shot, claps his hand convulsively to the painful bruise, and falls to rubbing his forehead with fierce energy, writhing his face into the most alarming contortions expressive of pain, and dancing about the floor in a grotesque manner, that induces his companion to suppose that the blow has surely knocked his mind out of joint.

While Philip is saying, "Excuse me!" "Beg pardon!" "I'm sorry!" and a number of like things, Ira suddenly makes a spring for a wooden half-bushel measure on which his eye chances to rest, catches it up, to the alarm of Philip, who fears he is about to knock his head off with it, and dashes it out the barn-door with all his strength. It strikes against the fence, and falls uninjured to the ground, whereupon the enraged Ira rushes forth, much to the amusement of Philip, and falls to kicking the poor piece of agricultural furniture most frantically. Having sent it spinning like a foot-ball all over the barn-yard, he presently returns to the interior, his anger much appeased, and takes a seat on a sack of grain.

It is true the poor, harmless half-bushel was not the cause of his pain, but then it sat there looking so provokingly complacent while a fellow-creature was suffering such agony, that it was too much to bear. We must say this much for Ira, even at the risk of being accused of partiality as a chronicler.

"I hope I did n't hurt you much," says Philip, with sympathy delineated in the very depths of his voice; and he cannot help feeling how awful his situation would be should he give utterance to that laugh which he feels rising in his throat.

"Oh, none of any account," replies Ira; and he arises, walks slowly from the barn, presently returns with the poor

abused and outraged half-bushel under his arm, and restores it to its place.

"I am very awkward with the flail," remarks Philip, in a tone of self-depreciation, by way of further apology; "not being accustomed to handling it."

"Oh, that's nothing," Ira replies, taking up his flail and resuming his work. The pain is all over now.

Philip remains in the barn conversing with his new acquaintance, until the dinner hour arrives, which is announced by several unearthly blasts on a tin horn. Ira is favorably impressed with the young man. Philip must not think of leaving till he has taken dinner, and seen Mary and his daughter. He *has* a daughter, he says, a little older than Mary. Mary's aunt also makes her home with them, and the four constitute the family. His wife, dear good soul, died many years ago. There is a tear in the impulsive man's eye as he tells this. Philip soothingly remarks that we must all meet with bereavements in this world, and that he, too, has lost friends; which is probably consolation similar to that experienced by a certain old lady on an occasion of the loss, by death, of a favorite cow. "Thank goodness," said the old lady, actually clapping her hands at the soothing reflection, "Joneses lost one only last week! I'm not the only one, I guess!"

Ira and his new-found friend proceed to the house, which is a hundred yards distant. There Philip is greeted and welcomed by Mary and her aunt, and introduced to Matilda, Ira's daughter, who certainly is "a little older" than Mary in appearance, for one's judgment would not suffer were he to pronounce her ten years older. After dinner Ira returns to the barn, bidding his guest stay awhile with the young folks. Philip consents to remain an hour before returning to the village. The young ladies entertain him, while Aunt Eliza, who cares nothing for male society, attends to household matters.

"Do you think this a wild place, Mr. Kirke?" asks Mary.

"I pronounce it very picturesque," is the reply.

"It is very lonely," observes Matilda. "You, who are accustomed to the stir of city life, may find it too dull."

"Not at all," replies Philip. "I like the solitude of these quiet places. It is in delightful contrast with the noise of the city." A pause. "Yes," he resumes, insinuatingly, "a quiet place by the mountain, adorned by the presence of those I esteem, I would not exchange for a city mansion. I would far rather take a ramble among the golden woods to-day, accompanied by a guileless and innocent country girl, than to parade the streets of New York or Philadelphia at the side of some reigning belle, full of shallow pride and aristocracy."

"You are sentimental," remarks Mary.

"Not at all. I have lived both in the country and in the city; and I have had opportunity to make comparisons. What I say is merely prompted by contemplations of what I have seen."

"You men are such flatterers," remarks Matilda. "No doubt you laugh at us plain country people when you find yourself in the city, surrounded by beauty and fashion."

"No, on honor," Philip replies. "Beauty I see in the country—a fresher, purer beauty than is to be found in the city. As for fashion, what is it but a mere shallow invention of the idle brain! If true beauty and real worth can be found anywhere, it is among the unsophisticated people of the country."

Well spoken, Philip! Even the devil may speak the truth when it answers his purpose better than a lie. It is clear that *you* are not one of the "unsophisticated." No, you carry with you malignant odors fresh from the vice-haunted city—flattery, treachery, deceit.

There is a pause in the conversation.

"How long since you returned to the village?" Mary at length asks. "You have been absent."

"I returned two months ago," is the reply.

"I thought you would have visited us ere this. You must not forget your old friends."

"Well, in truth," Philip responds, "I have often thought of coming to see you, but I knew you had met with a bereavement, and I almost dreaded that I should find you sad, pale, and emaciated. I learned that you had been quite ill, and I am agreeably surprised to see you looking so well as you do."

"I *was* quite ill," Mary remarks, "after the terrible sorrow that visited us last May. I am now just myself again. I have given my father up for dead, and have become in a manner reconciled to my loss. There is no doubt in my mind that he was murdered; were he still alive, in whatever situation, we should surely have heard from him ere this. I once thought I could never rally under such a blow, but my wonted health has returned of its own accord, and I am determined to keep my spirits from sinking, if possible, as a duty, if nothing more."

"It *is* a duty which you owe to yourself and your friends. Such a determination on your part is a mark of sound, Christian-like sense."

"I have always told her so," puts in Matilda.

"Right," says Philip, patronizingly. "Now, Mary, if you will pardon my familiarity—"

"Certainly."

"—I would just say to you, make yourself as happy as possible. Do not withhold yourself from society. Do not live such a secluded life. Your dear father would not wish you to make such a sacrifice, when there is nothing to be gained by it. The winter is approaching, and I presume we will have sleighing excursions and dances; you must promise me to attend. Your return to the gay circle of your old acquaintances will be hailed by them with delight."

"Yes, I am sure I will be welcome, and I think I will take your advice—to some extent, at least."

Thus the conversation goes on. Philip is much pleased

with Mary, and Mary is much pleased with him. So is Matilda, who thinks him a very charming young fellow.

At length Philip is about to take his leave.

"You will not make this your last visit," says Mary.

"Certainly you will come again," urges Matilda.

"Oh, you'll see me again," replies Philip. "I expect to remain about Weston for a year or two, perhaps, and in that time we will meet often. I am afraid you will grow tired of me."

"No fear of that," says Mary, laughing. "We will always be glad to see you. Come whenever you can. There are several points of interest on the mountain not far from here. You have never been at the White Rocks?"

"No."

"Nor at Delany's Cave?"

"No."

"Nor at the Sand Springs?"

"No."

"Those are all places of interest on the mountains. The White Rocks especially are worth seeing. They consist of several ledges of rock, of a peculiarly whitish color, rising up on the face of the mountain, to a perpendicular height of a hundred feet. In the summer it is a great place of resort for picnic parties. They usually go up on horseback. Delany's Cave, which is a mile or so from the White Rocks, is an extensive cavern descending into the mountains. It has never been entirely explored. Adventurous persons have penetrated more than two miles without arriving at any termination of the rough dark passage. A long way in the sound of rushing waters can be heard, but no large stream has ever been discovered. Two men entered some years ago, declaring that they would pierce to its uttermost depths ere they should return. Nothing has since been heard of them, and the most reasonable conclusion is, that they went in a long distance, lost their way among the innumerable passages which traverse the main one, and perished. The Sand

Springs is the name given to a picturesque spot on the mountain, some miles from here, where there are many springs of the purest water, flowing from a very sandy soil. These places are all pleasant and interesting. During the past summer but one party visited the mountain, and that was in June, while I was yet ill. But during some seasons we have half-a-dozen pleasant excursions to these places. Next summer, if you are here, I hope you will join us in our rambles."

"That I will," says Philip. "I am anxious to see the places you describe, and I will surely take occasion to visit them next summer, if not before."

"If you will come up one day soon, before the cold weather comes," suggests Mary, "Cousin Tilly and I will accompany you in a walk to the White Rocks. The distance is but two miles, and directly up the side of the mountain. The white surface of the rocks can be seen from almost any little eminence between here and Weston. I dare say you have observed the white spot on the side of the mountain?"

"I certainly have, but was not aware what it was. I will be glad to come up soon, and accompany you in a visit to the place."

"Please do so. Tilly and I will be at leisure to conduct you thither on any day you may come."

"I will come, then, by the first of November."

"Very well. Choose a clear day, and you will also be treated to a delightful view of the surrounding country in its autumnal dress."

"I will. Good-by."

"Good-by, and don't forget," says Mary.

"Good-by," says Matilda.

"Good-by," cries Aunt Eliza, who has left her work for a moment, for the purpose of uttering the farewell word.

And Philip, waving his hat in gallant adieu, walks toward the barn to take leave of Ira.

He finds that irascible gentleman in a good humor, and after some conversation relating to business, he departs for Weston.

CHAPTER X.

THE CLIFF.

LAUREL HILL, a tributary range of the Alleghany Mountains, rises in Western Virginia, takes its course a few degrees east of north, and terminates in Fayette county, Pennsylvania. It is composed of innumerable peaks and ridges, which vary in altitude from two thousand to three thousand feet. In Fayette county, Pennsylvania, but a few miles from the Virginia line, there are two tall ridges running at right angles with the main one, and separated by a deep gorge, which, to look down into it from above, seems to penetrate the very bowels of the earth. That lying toward the south is termed the "Cave Ridge," because it contains the immense cavern known as "Delany's Cave;" that lying north of the deep valley is called the "Rock Ridge," because of the romantic cliffs and ledges that cling to its abrupt side, to which the appellation of "White Rocks" is given.

On the south side of this great hill, and consequently facing the Cave Ridge, at the height of fifteen hundred feet above the lower country, the WHITE ROCKS are located. The principal ledge is about one hundred feet high and two hundred yards in length. It rises rather abruptly at the extremity toward the settlement, and ascends at a slight angle as it stretches itself along the face of the hill toward the deep mountains, where it breaks up into a series of smaller, less regular and less perpendicular ledges. But it is only of the main cliff that we will endeavor to give a brief description.

The summit of this huge rock is a smooth plateau, gently inclining back from the abrupt precipice, till, within thirty or forty paces, it intersects the rise of the mountain, which is

here quite steep, and thickly overgrown with bushes and small trees that grow to the very margin of the table rock. The latter, although it may be very properly termed a contiguous ledge, is here and there cloven asunder by crevices several feet wide; and one must be careful in stepping across them, lest he suddenly find himself precipitated many feet below, into some narrow den, infested by snakes. There are also smaller fissures, nearly full of earth, in which a few wan-looking saplings have managed to grow to the height of two or three feet.

Near the western extremity of the cliff there is one crevice about two feet wide, in which is a rough, irregular and difficult stairway, placed there by the hand of Nature. By means of this rude piece of architecture an active person may descend, though not without danger, to the base of the cliff. As we arrive at the bottom we emerge from a crevice in the lofty wall, and stand at the base of the WHITE ROCKS. Near this point we find a narrow cave in the solid rock, which we can penetrate to the distance of two hundred feet, when it grows so contracted that we find ourselves wedged in between two damp, dark walls, and further progress is impossible. Before turning about to retrace our steps, we look upward, and descry a faint ray of light, far, far above, which struggles through some stray crevice. Now let us return to the broad day.

Near the mouth of the cave, in the midst of a great heap of huge rocks, piled up by the same Hand that formed the ledge itself, a little vein of the purest water bubbles from the sand, ever shielded from the rays of the sun by overhanging rocks, and forms a delightful spring in a small cavity. As we glance upward, from near this point, to the top of the towering cliff, we feel a very slight uneasiness lest it should lose its hold upon the side of the steep hill, tumble over and crush us, and go rolling and leaping to the bottom of the great wild ravine below. We even fancy, at times, that we see it move, or tremble slightly; but that is because the sum-

mit is, for a moment, described against a fleecy cloud that is floating upon the blue sky far above. When the cloud has passed over, the tall, firm rock is once more grave and still. Let us return to the top of the cliff.

To describe the wild pictures that surround this elevated point is a task from which the pen modestly shrinks. We stand upon the bare rock, and turn toward the west. On our right the vision is obstructed by the abrupt rise of the rough, wood-covered hill, but on the left we look down into that yawning abyss, and across against the mighty face of the Cave Ridge, which seems to lift its head to the clouds. From here it appears almost perpendicular, and it is covered, from base to summit, with rocks, trees and vines. It is all wild, picturesque and lonely; and from the green fields where it rises in the west, to the tangled, intricate hills of the mountains toward the east, where it hides itself from view—from the depths of the shady valley by which it rears itself aloft, to its rugged crest across which the clouds can scarcely drag their way—we see written but the one great name—NATURE!

But before us lies the grandest picture of all. As we gaze out from between the two great mountain ridges upon the beautiful landscape; when we see the woodlands—the green fields, where the sheep and cattle are feeding—the rolling hills, which apparently rise one above another, as though formed for some mighty amphitheater—what words so powerful as to convey a fair description of the picture? What language so exalted, so sublime, as to eulogize it? None! The pen is motionless before it; the tongue is silent; the voice is dumb; the eye gleams with pleasure and glows with admiration as it takes in the scene; the mind, in its contemplation, silently soars on high, and instinctively adores the great Creator; the vices, the pleasures, the passions of the world are forgotten, and we feel as though we would dash aside this garb of clay, and fly to Him whose hand hath wrought these glorious works!

The month of October has passed away with a week of blustering weather, and the days of the "Indian summer" are come. It is a bright, clear day, save that a thin vapor of the softest blue is mingled with the atmosphere, as is usual during these pleasant days. The trees are nearly bare now, and almost everywhere the ground is strewn with the dead leaves which have been torn from the forests and blown hither and thither by the early autumn winds.

We must visit the White Rocks to-day.

We leave the main road to take its way through the valley that pierces the mountain, while we ascend the steep ridge on the left by a bridle-path that picks its upward way among the ragged gray rocks, the wild bushes, and the deep-green pines.

Winding about, now to the right, now to the left, now clambering over the trunk of a fallen tree which obstructs the way, or some ill-shapen rock that has become detached from its place and rolled into the path, we at last find ourselves many hundred feet above the valley below, where the air is light and a little difficult to breathe. By and by the path, which is all the way closely hemmed in by bushes on either side, turns abruptly to the right, and descends rapidly toward the gorge. The White Rocks are not far distant now. We follow the path in its downward course, and in a few minutes emerge from the thicket, and step forth upon the cliff. A moment ago we could not see half a dozen paces around us; now, at a single glance, we can take in hundreds of square miles.

To-day all the landscape lying between this point and the river is clearly visible; but as we gaze far away beyond the Monongahela, the hills grow dim in the distance, and are finally lost to view in the hazy atmosphere of Indian summer. The river itself is not visible, for its bed lies deep in the earth. Neither can the village of Weston be seen, for it is just behind that hill on which the church stands.

The breeze is very quiet; it scarcely rustles the crisp

leaves that lie in great beds upon the ground; it does not stir the green branches of the pine or cedar; nor does it move the crooked limbs and bare twigs of the chestnut or the oak. The slanting rays of the sun fall quite pleasantly upon the mountain, and upon the brown fields of the country spread out below.

"And this is the place?" says Philip Kirke, as accompanied by Mary White and her cousin, he emerges from the thick bushes, and stands upon the giant cliff.

"Yes, beneath your feet are the White Rocks," is the reply.

"A romantic place, certainly," he remarks.

"Do not go too near the brink," cautions Mary, as Philip walks slowly in that direction, "for you can imagine the consequences of a fall from such a height."

"Has any one ever fallen over?" he asks.

"Not within my recollection," Mary replies. "It is said that the savages, who inhabited this part of the country many years ago, used to dispose of the prisoners they captured in war with other tribes by dashing them over this precipice. The White Rocks were used as a place of execution for many years, and, could they speak, might relate such tales of horror as the world has never heard. Tradition says that a thousand unhappy creatures, taken in battle by the victorious warriors, were hurled over in one day; and that a noted chief, who was among them, was reserved till the last, to be executed by the chief of the victorious party in person. When his time came, the captive chief walked firmly to the verge of the precipice, and, ere he could be hurled over, seized his enemy, dragged him after, and both fell headlong from the dizzy height."

"A singular tradition," Philip remarks.

"Yes, very. In these enlightened days it is almost difficult to realize that such barbarism was ever practiced."

"It is. Yet there is no doubt the story is virtually true, if not in point of fact. In the history of civilized nations we read of similar deeds of cruelty and depravity. But let us

descend to the base of the cliff. I believe you said there was a way to get down?"

"Yes, there are two ways."

"Well, let us take the easiest."

"I would rather not, for the easiest way is to jump over. The other, however, and the way we had better go, is through yonder crevice. There is a rough stairway, which we may descend with a little care and some exertion."

"Very well. Come on."

When they have descended, they stand for awhile surveying the face of the cliff.

"Ah!" Philip exclaims, as some object near the top arrests his eye, "what letters are those away up there?"

"They are G. R.," Mary returns—"George Roland's initials."

"How came they there?" he asks, with evident concern.

"George cut them there himself some years ago. He was always a reckless fellow, and he did that at the risk of his life."

"How did he manage it? for the letters appear to be little lower than a man could reach from the top."

"Yes, the letters are ten feet from the top. One day, while in the village, George made a bet with that noisy fellow, Ned Stanton—you know *him*—"

"Yes, I know Ned."

"—that the next time a picnic party should visit this place he would cut his initials on the side of the cliff, ten feet below the brink. Accordingly, on the next excursion, he carried with him a hammer and chisel, and about thirty feet of small rope. He kept them concealed till we arrived upon the rock, when he deliberately drew the rope from beneath his coat, tied one end to a small sapling that grew in a crevice near the edge, and the other around his body, and over he went, before we had the least idea of his intentions, descended to the right point, and, with hammer and chisel, which he carried in his pocket, won his bet."

"A daring fellow," Philip remarks.

"Too much so," is Mary's reply.

The trio visit the cave in the rock, and other interesting points about the base of the cliff, and at last return to the summit.

"What a delightful view!" Philip exclaims, in admiration of the out-stretched country.

"No better can be obtained from any point on the mountain," Mary replies.

"Don't go so near, you might fall over!" exclaims Tilly, although they are ten or twelve feet from the precipice. She is evidently an advocate of the keep-on-the-safe-side principle.

"No danger," Philip and Mary reply, in concert; and they draw still nearer the brink, just to scare Tilly.

"*I* can see quite as well here," she remarks, taking her position upon a large stone of several tons weight, which lies a dozen paces from the brink.

"It was here," observes Mary, "that George Roland lowered himself over the edge of the rock to put his reckless scheme into execution. There," pointing to a little snag that protrudes from a crevice, "is all that remains of the sapling to which he attached the end of the rope before descending."

"Ah!" is the brief comment of Philip, who regrets that it did not pull up by the roots just as the adventurous fellow was executing the tail of the "R."

There is a pause.

"What kind of flower is that?" he asks, abruptly.

"Where?"

"There—growing right on the edge of the rock," he replies, pointing to a little flower that can just be seen hanging by a thin stem over the brink.

"It is a tender-looking flower," Mary replies. "How singular! It would look odd enough in such a place even in the spring—it is doubly curious now."

"I'll go and get it," says Philip; and he steps to the spot, stoops cautiously, and plucks the flower.

But as he pulls it from its hold in the mossy rock, it slips from his fingers and disappears from view.

"Too bad!" he exclaims, in a tone of vexation. "I have half a mind to jump over after it."

"Do n't do *that*," Mary responds, playfully, "or Tilly and I will jump over after *you*."

"For your sakes I wont, then," Philip replies, and he returns to his place near Mary; having very injudiciously, we think, concluded not to throw himself over after the truant flower.

"It is strange," Mary murmurs, "about that flower. The more I think of it the more inexplicable it becomes. It is past my comprehension how it came in such a place at such a time."

"I am not versed in botany, and can offer no explanation," Philip rejoins. "But I know one thing—it wont take me long to go down and get it; and I will do so, just to see what it looks like." And waiting for no remonstrance, he speeds away to the crevice, and descends the uneven stairs.

"BEWARE!"

Such is the word that greets Mary's ears as she is carefully drawing near the precipice to look over. The voice sounds strange, and she turns quickly.

"Did you speak, Tilly?" she asks.

"No."

"Did you hear any one speak?"

"No."

There is a rustling among the bushes near the path, and the girls momentarily expect to see some one step forth. But no one appears; and when Philip returns he finds them earnestly regarding the bushes.

"What is the matter?" he asks.

"Nothing; only we thought we heard some one, but we must have been mistaken. Did you get the flower?"

"Could n't find it," is the reply.

"Why, where can it have gone?"

"I could discover no shelf in the side of the cliff, on which it might have lodged while descending, and I conclude that, as it was quite light, it must have been carried away among the bushes by the breeze."

"That must be it," Mary concurs.

"Oh dear!" says Tilly, impatiently, "let us go. Don't spend so much time about an insignificant little flower."

"It *is* time to go," Mary observes.

"Yes," says Philip, "for I must return to the village to-night."

They walk slowly to the path, take a parting glance at the bare rocks, the deep abyss, and the tall ridge beyond, disappear among the bushes, and are soon descending the mountain. Mary is rather quiet and thoughtful as they go down the lonely path. When asked what is the matter, she replies, "Nothing," and continues to ponder on that strange word she heard at the WHITE ROCKS—that warning word—"BEWARE!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE WINTER.

THE first winter embraced in our narrative passed away without any event of much importance. It was an exceedingly cold winter, the snow lying upon the ground to the depth of twenty inches for more than two months. During most of this time the sky remained clear, which rendered the nights most biting cold. Nor could the power of the sun be felt in the atmosphere during the day, so sharp was the wind, and the surface of the earth so frost-bound.

Every spring, and almost every stream, was sealed up by

the remorseless breath of winter. The ice upon the river grew to such a thickness, that it was difficult to determine whether or not there was really any running water beneath it at all. Some thought that the whole bed of the river had become one solid mass of ice—that the water had chilled and frozen from the surface to the pebbly bottom. If such were the case, it was agreed by all that the fish, and other creatures of the lower element, would labor under the most unprecedented inconvenience.

On occasions of sleighing-parties, which even the kingly J. Frost, in all his might and power, could not deter the young folks from concocting and carrying out, the horses which drew the sleds and sleighs were literally arrayed in a coat of frost, cut out, made up, and fitted with most astonishing despatch by the keen air, their steaming breath furnishing the material; while the beards and coat collars of the young men, and the shawls, bonnets, and veils of the young ladies, were as speedily encrusted with the same wintery covering. Many cattle and domestic fowls perished with cold in the course of the winter, but no human being of the settlement was so unfortunate. There were no needy people around Weston, although there were many who were far from being wealthy. Their houses were all good enough to shut out the winter winds, and while everything without was pierced and chilled with the cold, the blazing bituminous coal that was piled upon the grate made everything comfortable and cheerful within. A brighter, happier picture cannot be imagined than that of the farmer and his family sitting around their glowing coal fire on a winter evening. The scene is the same now as it was then. There is no other light than that of the blazing fire, and it is almost as bright as gas-light. The farmer himself is seated at one side of the fireplace, reading the "Life of Washington," the "History of the Revolution," or some simple, though useful work, while the busy wife sits opposite, knitting or sewing. In front of the fire are the boys and girls, occupied with slate

and pencil, arithmetic, grammar, and other school commodities. If the girls are beyond the age of school-girls, they are probably occupied like the mother; or if the boys are beginning to be young men, they are perhaps mending a whip, a bridle, a "jockey-stick," or engaged in reading, like the father. Nine o'clock is their "bed-time," and when that hour comes they invariably retire.

The reader will pardon this wandering from the story, as it is the object of the author to give, as he goes along, a brief outline of rural life in Western Pennsylvania; and as he spent a matter of eighteen years in that region, beginning with his first birth-day, he thinks it would be nothing to boast of if he were to succeed in giving a pretty accurate idea of manners and customs there.

It would be fair to presume that the operations of the mysterious robbers were necessarily suspended during the severe winter, and so they were; which was sufficient evidence that they were but mortal, even aside from the fact that Will Hempstead and John Duffey had captured one of them and brought him to the village (from which, however, he had escaped), during the preceding September. William Hardin and his worthy comrades adhered with wonderful tenacity to their cave, which in the coldest weather was perfectly comfortable. They had sufficient provisions, the fruits of their previous summer's labors, to place them beyond want for the whole winter, and even longer, and in eating, drinking, and sleeping they whiled the hours away. They had plenty of firewood piled up in their capacious abode, but water they could only obtain by melting snow; and it becomes a fact worthy of remark, that, when the spring came, and the snow began to succumb to the rays of the sun and the early rains, that steep hill-side, which did n't hold much snow at the best, was the first spot for many miles round to peep forth from its white cover.

It was supposed by the people of the settlement that the robbers had left the vicinity on account of the cold, and it

was earnestly hoped they would never return; but they were not aware how comfortably these robbers were situated, and where, nor did they dream that their honored chief was making himself comfortable at the village tavern.

Philip Kirke was quite successful in his financial enterprises during the autumn, visiting Pittsburg twice with boat-loads of grain, and realizing large profits both times. He was almost induced to believe that he could do better by cutting loose from his friends at the cave, and pursuing his new avocation on his own account exclusively, and he even wished that he could do so with safety; but he felt that he was "in for it," and that were he to forsake Bill and the others he could never be at ease in the neighborhood, through constant fear of being their next victim in the way of business, or of being betrayed by them to the people. To leave Weston would not promote the object he had in view, namely, to marry Miss White, and thereby wound the heart of his hated rival. After the cold weather set in he did not once visit the cave, nor was he expected to by his companions, until the spring approached and the winter began to relax. He remained about the village during the winter, and visited all the social parties in the vicinity, at only one of which he met Mary White. The distance at which she now lived from the village rendered it impracticable for her to attend parties in that vicinity very often during the winter season.

George Roland did not hold himself aloof from the society of the young. He still loved Mary White, but now that it was clear she could never be his, he determined to bear his disappointment with a good grace; and he behaved with such apparent gayety, that those who had frequently gossiped of his having been "cut out" by Phil Kirke, and of his having probably received the "mitten" at the hands of Mary, now began to think that he had never cared especially for her. Philip Kirke, however, saw, with the keen eyes of exultant envy, that George *did* love Mary, and that her probable rejection of him still rankled in his bosom; and, highly

elated by the fact, he determined to woo, win, and marry the young farmer's lost sweetheart, and render his misery complete. The rivals frequently met, and although there was no cordiality between them, there was politeness of speech and demeanor that was very distant from altercation.

George, by way of hiding his real feelings, began to pay his devoirs to a little blue-eyed angel of the name of Kitty Hempstead (a cousin of Will), who was just emerging from the "short dresses" of halcyon girlhood into the stately, ankle-concealing robes of womanhood. Kitty was a pretty girl, and although George did not love her as he did Mary White, he liked her very much, and preferred her society to that of any other girl in the settlement—Mary excepted. Her fun-loving, mischievous eyes, her silvery voice, and merry laugh did much to dispel the sadness and gloom from his heart.

Will Hempstead was not decidedly a "lady's man," although where youth and beauty assembled he was generally present. His companion, if any one, was a bashful sister of John Duffey, and as neither did much talking, they got on right smoothly together, and certainly with reasonable peace and quiet.

As for John, it was confidently asserted that he was never seen on two different occasions in company with the same girl. He was regarded as a fickle fellow, and one who must inevitably, at last—terrible thought!—fill a bachelor's grave. It was clear to the young folks that he would never be likely to extend his attention to any one within dreaming distance of marriage; and but for his merry disposition and witty words, which always made his society pleasant, any marriageable lassie whose lot it was to be his companion for a day at a picnic, would have regarded it as so much time wasted.

Ned Stanton, who was beginning to forget the churchyard affair, entered society again, and led quite a gay life during the winter. He met Miss Matilda at one party in the course of the winter, and at once proceeded to manifest decided

symptoms of not thinking her quite the oldest or least attractive female in the world. He spent a little time in her company, by way of beginning to carry out his promise to his friend Dick, and he subsequently asserted that no man ever made such a sacrifice for a friend. He advanced but one step at that time toward the consummation. The point gained was merely an intimation from Matilda, in reply to a pathetic and earnest inquiry on his part, that certainly he was quite excusable for thoughtlessly taking the "liberty" of addressing her as "Tilly." When he solemnly vowed that he would not again be so rude, she assured him it was not the slightest harm, begged him not to think it, and above all things to remember that they were only country folks, and could not be expected to preserve inviolate a code of politeness by which the people of great cities chose to be governed.

The result of this little colloquial incident was to convince the delighted "Tilly" that the dear Ned of her heart entertained for her, in that manly bosom of his, feelings of the most profound respect, if nothing more; and when she came to remember that love and respect usually go together, and that she had seen the one clearly exhibited, she felt, in her trembling heart, that the other might not be far off. Oh, that brave fellow! who had never yet shown fear in the face of man! to be conquered by her, a feeble, tender maiden! To fall at her feet, and request to be permitted to yield up the ghost for her dear sake! To spring up, an accepted protector, take her in his strong arms, and shed tears of joy! In fact—oh, dear!

Ah, cruel Ned! Have you the heart to deceive this gentle, confiding creature of but thirty short summers, and break her heart, even to avenge a friend? If you have, the great moral question of "total depravity" is set at rest forever. Perhaps she *did* flirt just a little with your quiet friend Dick; perhaps she *did* encourage him in his attentions, and finally give him the "mitten;" but that was ten years ago, and ought to be forgotten now. Relent, Ned! Relent! But no! he has

pledged his word, which he considers better than a rich man's oath any day, that he will mete out to her, grain for grain, the very measure of heartache which she ruthlessly caused poor Dick. Ah, Dick! Honest friend! Quiet, civil fellow! You shall be avenged!

Has the reader ever seen a freshet on one of the Western rivers? Or has he stood near when, after a long, cold, and severe winter, the ice is "breaking up?" As the water rises, and the ice is torn from the banks to float away, first cracking and splitting across from shore to shore, then breaking into cakes of various sizes, then moving slowly down the stream, pushing, gorging, crowding, crashing, piling up and tumbling over, the noise can be heard for miles. The sound produced by the cracking and breaking of the thick ice is like the mingling of musketry and artillery, and on a still night it rolls continually forth and reverberates among the surrounding hills. The author has heard the Monongahela "breaking up," and has seen the high muddy waters of the freshet on more than one spring. The spectacle is always grand and interesting in proportion to the amount of snow which has lain on the mountains during the winter, which is generally melted away by a protracted rain, and comes rushing down, soon filling the bed of the river, and often overflowing the banks, carrying away mills, houses, and other property. The thicker the ice, too, which usually goes off with the high water, the louder the sound when it breaks up, and the more fiercely it rushes on its way. Chickens, geese, dogs, pigs, and other domestic creatures, which have been suddenly swept into the current by the rising water, have been frequently seen floating slowly down the river on large cakes of ice, looking around in wonder at the new scenery which is constantly unfolded to them as they move along.

After the severe winter of which we have briefly spoken, there was a freshet on the Monongahela, and a "breaking up" of ice, such as had not been seen for many years. Early in the month of March the weather began to moderate, a

heavy rain set in, the snow speedily melted away, and the very clouds seemed to come rolling down the mountain. The ice in the river relaxed its cold grasp on the banks, and began to crack, and split, and break, and crash, with such a commotion as might attend a hurricane on its rush through the tall forest. Higher and higher rose the muddy waters, till the banks in many places were submerged. Nor did they stop then; they rose till many of the inhabitants of Weston discovered that it would be a perfectly practicable matter to float a skiff in at their second-story windows. All the boats of the ferry, as well as those belonging to private citizens, were carefully looked after, that the high water and heavy ice might not carry them away, and they became quite useful in removing goods from the deluged houses. It looked odd to see a flat-boat or skiff coming coolly up street, and stopping at somebody's window to be loaded with beds, chairs, tables, and the like. Much property that could not be removed in time was damaged or ruined by the water. None of the houses were carried away, as the flood did not rise higher than the second story, but when the waters had subsided, and the escaped occupants returned to view their domiciles, they were rather astonished at the amount of mud and sand that had collected upon the floors and walls, and in the cellars. The houses were so changed in appearance that one family proceeded to re-occupy the wrong building, and only discovered their mistake when they observed that the chimney stood at the wrong end. Even then they were fain to suggest that some mad eddy of the waters had whirled the house around; but on being reminded that such a change in the position of the house would have thrown the front door in the rear, within a few feet of the well-filled well, they were effectually convinced of their mistake.

Many incidents have been related of that remarkable freshet. Some of them are amusing, but the most are sad and fraught with woe. There was one family that lived in a small house on the river shore, about ten miles below Weston,

of whom a sad story has been told. Their house stood upon an eminence near the river, to whose summit the water had never before been known to rise, and which descended on all sides, so that it had often been surrounded by water during former freshets. One night, on the occasion in question, they retired as usual, aware that the water was rising, but little imagining that it could ascend to their cottage. Before morning, however, they were aroused from their sleep, and horrified beyond measure by hearing the water pouring in at the windows, and the heavy cakes of ice thumping against the walls. Then the agonizing thought rushed upon them, that deep water surrounded them on all sides, and that should the rise continue there was no hope for them. An honest laborer, his wife, a boy of eight years, and a little infant composed the family. Their house was only one story high, but there was a kind of loft or garret next to the roof. Springing from bed, and finding themselves knee-deep in water, they at once ascended to this loft by means of a ladder that stood in the corner, the mother clasping her babe to her bosom, and the father taking his boy in his arms. Probably the water would not have reached them there, but they had no sooner gained what for the time appeared a safe retreat, than their humble dwelling began to totter, and in another minute it was swept away, the wretched parents with their little children were cast out in the black night, amid the foaming waters, and the cruel, cold ice crushed them down, passed remorselessly over, and went surging on as though ten thousand such deeds would not appease its seeming rage.

Many like scenes might be portrayed to illustrate the ravages of that flood, but we must pass them by, and proceed with events that have a more direct bearing upon our story.

CHAPTER XII.

THE FORTUNE-TELLER.

MAY has come again. It is so warm and pleasant, too; the fields and trees are so beautiful and green; the birds are singing so merrily in the thick foliage, and the sheep and young lambs are sporting so gayly in the pastures, that one can scarcely realize that a cold, chilling winter, with its heavy snows, is barely gone. King Winter has departed now, and not a single trace of his rough footsteps is seen anywhere, for no sooner had his bleak winds and blinding storms rolled away than the young buds peeped timidly forth, as though half doubting that he had really gone, and the tender blades of grass began to thrust themselves from the ground; and now all Nature has revived from the shock she so lately felt, and is as blithe and happy as though winter had never stripped her of her green robes.

It is nine o'clock, the pleasantest hour of this beautiful May morning. The sun has risen far above the mountain, and the dew has everywhere disappeared from the leaves and the grass. Ira Tate with a neighbor, who is helping him to-day, is in the field planting corn. He is in excellent humor, as who would n't be this delightful morning? and has not killed a chicken or a dog, nor broken a hoe or anything of the sort to-day.

At the farm-house the morning's work is done, and Aunt Eliza, Mary, and Tilly have not much to do.

"It's such a lovely day, Tilly," observes Mary, "that I should like to take a walk somewhere."

"So should I," Tilly replies.

"Suppose we walk up the mountain," Mary suggests.

"I am willing, if Aunt Eliza"—Tilly so calls her—"will get the dinner."

"Oh, she will, I know, and gladly, for she frequently says that help in such small matters is only in the way. I'll ask her. I say, Aunty!"

"Well?" responds Aunty, from the depths of the kitchen.

"Can you get dinner without our help to-day?"

"Why do you ask? Are you both sick?"

"Oh, no. On the contrary, we are so very well that we feel like taking a walk up the mountain this lovely morning."

"I suppose I can get along without you. But don't stay too long, or you'll have me uneasy."

"Oh, we'll be back about dinner-time. So, we're off, Tilly. Get your bonnet; I have mine already."

Tilly gets her bonnet, and away the cousins go, tripping down the path, out at the gate, and along the road till they reach the mountain path, into which they turn and begin their upward walk.

"Oh, it's *so* pleasant!" Tilly exclaims, with an earnest contraction of the eyebrows, which seems to imply that it is disagreeably so.

"Very," is her cousin's brief reply.

They do not travel quite so fast now, for the mountain grows steeper and steeper, and the path more and more rugged.

"What if we should meet old Molly Pry, and we by ourselves?" Tilly abruptly suggests, half alarmed at the very thought.

"Why, if we were to meet her," returns Mary, with a slight inclination to witticism, "we would not be *by ourselves*."

"We would have bad company, then," rejoins Tilly, "which is worse than none."

"Why, you don't fear that old woman, do you?"

"Don't I? Well, if I were to meet her up here in the

mountains, and I alone, I should faint—I know I should," Tilly confidently affirms.

"Why so? She was never known to harm any one."

"No, not directly; but if she predicts evil of any one it is sure to come to pass; and that is what I should fear—that she might say some horrid things of my future. Three men once, of the names of Butler, Dougherty and Flanigan, of whom you have no doubt heard—"

"Yes, I have heard of them."

"Well, they were up in the mountain after chestnuts, and they met old Molly, and provoked her in some way, and she cursed them, and predicted that they would all be hung before a year. She came pretty near the truth, if not quite. Butler was hung for killing and robbing a drover before six months—the only man ever hung in Fayette county; Dougherty shot a man over in Greene county, and was hung by a mob before the year was up, and Flanigan, about the same time, murdered his wife with an ax, and ran away to escape justice. It is not known positively that Molly's prediction was verified in his case, though it has been rumored that he fled to Ohio, and shortly after, in a crazy fit, brought on by drink, hung himself in a barn."

"I have heard of those men, and of their deeds, but I was not aware that old Molly warned them of their fate."

"She had, though; for they stopped at our house on their way home and took dinner, and they laughingly told father of their adventure with the old woman, how they had teased and taunted her to hear her swear, and how she had prophesied that they should all be hung before chestnuts should be ripe again. It was ten years ago, and I was quite young then, but I remember it distinctly."

We wonder whether Tilly means quite a young girl or quite a young woman.

"Have you ever seen the old woman?" asks Mary.

"I have never seen her, though I am sure I should know her by the description I have had of her. They say she is

the frightfulest and wretchedest looking little old woman that lives on the mountain."

"Now I would just like to meet her," says Mary. "I really hope we may. If we do, I'll get her to tell our fortunes. Do you think she would?"

"Certainly. I have heard that she tells everyone's fortune whom she meets, without even being asked. If they don't want her to, and go away from her, she will yell it after them."

"*I'll* not run away if we meet her. I think it would be fun to have our fortunes told. Think of her telling us all about our future husbands—who they are, what they 're like, how old they are, and—"

"Oh, you know *yours* already," Tilly interrupts.

"Do I?" Mary rejoins. "Now who should it be? I appeal to you for information."

"Oh, *you* know. Who should it be but Mr. Kirke!"

"I don't know that," Mary returns, with a blush. "I think, however, you may safely say who *yours* is to be. If you can't, *I* can."

"No you can't, for I don't intend to marry. I have had many an opportunity, but I have always been determined not to tie myself to any one. I like to be my own mistress—to go where and when I please, stay as long as I please, and come back when I please. Talk of your married bliss! It's nonsense! Think of a surly brute of a husband to wait on, and half a dozen ch——Oh, it isn't worth talking of. Give me the bliss of single life! A single life for me!"

"Then, if such are your ideas, beware. I know a certain fellow who will have your heart before you know it."

"Who is it?"

"Mr. Ned Stanton."

It is now Tilly's turn to blush—and she does.

"Do you suppose for a moment that I care for him?" she asks, faintly.

"I should n't be surprised."

"I never thought of such a thing," replies Tilly; her voice, however, betraying the fact that she has thought of such a thing, and is thinking of it now—with pleasure.

"Then I suppose you were only flirting with him that evening at the party," Mary suggests.

"And I suppose you were only flirting with Philip Kirke," Tilly returns, evasively.

"Well, I am not in the habit of flirting, but—Dear me! I'm so tired! let us rest."

And with this abrupt change in the topic of conversation, they seat themselves upon a rock.

"We must be half way to the White Rocks," suggests Tilly.

"Yes, and may as well go all the way."

"I am willing. Oh, the day is *so* pleasant," says Tilly, probably forgetting that she has already imparted that piece of information to Mary.

They are soon sufficiently recovered from their slight fatigue to resume their way up the mountain; which they do, and in half an hour arrive at the White Rocks.

"The view will be beautiful to-day," observes Mary.

"Splendid!" replies Tilly, with some feeling.

They are soon upon the high cliff, and approaching the precipice. But they are suddenly startled by beholding the withered, shrunken form of an old woman sitting upon the very verge of the cliff, where George Roland once went over to carve his initials, her feet actually dangling over the precipice.

"Who is that?" whispers Mary, trembling with a strange dread which she has never felt before.

"It must be Molly Pry," returns Tilly, in a whisper.

"So void of fear—so reckless of her life?"

"Yes, her very nature. She don't see us. Let us away!"

They are about to turn and flee, when the old woman looks quietly around and sees them, but expresses no surprise. They hesitate. She slowly rises to her feet and confronts

them. She stands fearlessly on the very brink of the precipice.

It is Molly Pry, the well-known fortune-teller of the mountain, who has, on many occasions, given proof of a strange power to tell of past events, and foretell of those to come. Her appearance, as she stands there, is miserable, squalid and wretched, not to say frightful. She is about five feet high and very thin—almost a skeleton. Her apparel consists of nothing but rags from head to foot—miserable, colorless, dirty rags. The coarse black hair hangs in tangled masses from her head, which is entirely void of any artificial covering. Her cheeks are hollow and sunken, and her small black eyes are set so deep in her head, and they glance out in such a disagreeable way, that one feels as uneasy in front of them as though they were the muzzles of loaded pistols.

"What are ye afeerd of?" she asks, in a shrill voice, leveling her gaze on Mary. "Ye can't fall over the rock while I'm a standin' on this spot, though ye may when I'm not hur to watch ye."

"Excuse us, my good woman," Mary tremblingly replies; "but we are only a little surprised at seeing any one here."

"Well, ye need n't fear me. I never was knowed to hurt nobody what did n't do me no harm. My name's Molly Pry; d'ye ever hear o' me?"

"I think I have," Mary replies. "You can tell fortunes, can't you?"

"Yes, an' *mis*-fortune, too."

"Oh, I hope you would n't tell *me* any misfortunes."

"I'll tell ye the truth; I'll tell ye what's past and what's to come. Gi' me yer hand;" and Molly advances, and takes Mary's unresisting but trembling hand.

Mary shudders. She would withdraw her hand from the bony grasp of the old hag, but she fears to; she would avert her gaze from the piercing, half-hidden eyes that are bent on her, but she cannot.

"Ah," begi- the old woman, "he was struck down in a

dark wood for his gold, and he never saw ye again—died under the ground among the rocks, wavin' his hand an' tryin' to call to ye, his pale face covered with his own blood, and—"

"Stop, for heaven's sake," interrupts Mary, turning pale.

"Why, what's the matter?"

Mary trembles, but does not reply.

"Ah, I've told ye the truth, have I?" says the old beldam. "Well, that's of the past. I'll tell o' the future now."

"Go on; but don't tell me things like that."

"Well," resumes the old hag, "I'll tell of love; yes, love; plenty o' love—for you, all for you—love, fun, happiness enjoyment, followed by—"

"By what?" Mary asks, as the old woman hesitates.

"Sickness, sadness, horror, murder, blood—yes, *blood*—"

"Oh, let me hear no more!" shudders Mary, now dropping the long hand, staggering back, and seating herself, pale and half fainting, upon the same rock upon which Tilly stood last fall.

"Now I'll tell *your'n*," says the old hag, turning coolly to Mary's cousin.

"Oh, I'm afraid!" exclaims Tilly, starting back in alarm.

"Oh, there's nothin' so bad for *you*," says the old woman, advancing and taking Tilly's hand. "*Your* father wasn't murdered, nor *you* ain't to be dashed to pieces among the rocks. *Your* lover—ha! you've got a lover, so you have! Yes, a lover. What a gallant fellow he is! How bravely he woos! He kneels at your feet. What! Rejected? He springs up, rushes madly away, and—"

"And what?" Tilly asks, breathlessly.

"Drowns himself."

Tilly screams.

"Oh, I don't want to hear any more. I feel so queer," she gasps.

"Very well, then. I have no more to tell. Why, how pale ye both look! Don't be skeered. Ye must git used to

death an' murder. *I* am. Death's nothin'. *I* die often. It's only fun." And going on in this wandering style, she again approaches Mary, who is still seated on the rock. "Here," she says, "take this; I found it on the brink there. It would 'a fell over if I had n't been there." And she hands Mary a little flower, exactly like the one that was seen growing on the brink of the precipice last autumn.

Mary takes it mechanically, shuddering more than ever.

"Where did you get this?" she asks.

"Growin' there," replies the old woman, pointing to the brink of the precipice, where Mary had first seen her. "Ah, he tried hard to dash it down upon the rocks below, but he could n't. Beware of him! He may yit! It is a tender plant, and in his rough grasp the blood would start from it and rouse the vengeance of the people there!"—waving her hand wildly toward the settlement—"then more blood would flow! Blood! Blood! Blood! Beware of him! BEWARE!" And the old creature turns and walks swiftly away.

"She do n't know what she is talking about," says Mary, as the old woman disappears among the bushes.

"I am sure she do n't," agrees Tilly. "She must be crazy; she talks like one in a delirium."

"True. I shall pay no attention to what she has said. Dear me," Mary goes on, now half laughing, "she talks of nothing but murder, and—"

"Drowning," suggests Tilly.

"Yes, and drowning. It would be ridiculous to give a thought to what she has said. It is strange about this flower, though," says Mary, growing more grave. "It seems to have sprung up just where we saw one last fall. Perhaps it is a kind that grows up here; some kind of wild mountain flower. I'll take it home. We should go soon."

"I think it is time to go now. We have spent so much time with that woman, it must be after eleven o'clock."

"Near twelve, I should say. I wonder when we will be here again?"

"I suppose there will be a picnic party here before long. We'll come to that, won't we?"

"Oh, yes. It has been nearly two years since I attended one. So, good-by, White Rocks, till we see you again. Farewell, but not forever."

CHAPTER XIII.

A PLOT.

OUR friends at the cave felt some delicacy about opening the summer's campaign. May had actually come, ay, and almost gone again, and beyond a few petty thefts, by way of replenishing their larder, they had done *nothing*. Whether it was because Bill's narrow escape of the previous autumn had rendered them timid, or that they had naturally grown dilatory during their winter's idleness, is but a matter of conjecture. Probably no small share of their tardiness was owing to the depressing influence which Bill's fearful adventure exercised upon them; for they were well aware of the rough manner in which he was handled at the village, and the alarming want of commiseration with which he met there in his awful peril.

That gentleman, for some weeks after his adventure of the previous September, labored under the most serious indisposition, not without symptoms of brain fever, and on several occasions it required all the strength and ingenuity of his companions to prevent him from rushing from the cave and hurling himself over the rocky steep into the river. Once or twice, too, it taxed to the utmost their argumentative powers, to convince him that it was inexpedient to saw his head off with one of their fine saws; but when, in his delirium, he imagined

himself still struggling in the hands of the incensed villagers, and screamed out in terror, "Oh, don't hang me! Don't kill me, and I'll tell you all! I'll tell you all about the cave where we stay, and of the murder of Henry White!" they could not help congratulating themselves that they had rescued him in time, and that his ravings had not been heard outside the fraternity.

Bill had now thoroughly recovered from his illness, and was as well as ever physically, though certainly no better morally. About the last of May he and his companions were lounging idly about the mouth of the cave, concealed from the very sun himself by overhanging foliage, when the shrill notes of the tin whistle were heard in the little nook below.

"Hark! What does that mean?" exclaimed one of the villains.

"Must be the captain," Bill lazily replied.

"But how did he git away down there without passin' us?" asked Joe.

"Don't know, unless he missed his way an' come down on t'other side."

"He knows his way too well for that," said one of the others. "He allus comes from above, and he's come it in the night, too."

"Well, I'll answer it," said Bill; "git yer pistols, and we'll go down and see how things is, any way."

While his four companions entered the cave, Bill put his whistle to his lips, and "uttered a blast" which made that vicinity sound as though it were alive with whippoorwills. In reply several sharp notes again came from the nook below, echoing from side to side as they ascended.

"Well, we're ready," said Sam, as they emerged from the cave, each with a pair of heavy pistols.

"Come on then," said Bill, "and if it's any feller a trickin' us, let him look out."

All now stealthily descended the steep declivity, and soon

found themselves at the water's edge and in the presence of Philip Kirke, who sat lazily in a small boat in the little harbor.

"Why, where d'ye come from?" asked Bill.

"From Weston," was the reply. "It is a pleasant day, and I borrowed this boat an hour ago to take a row. Thinking the scenery fully as attractive below the village as above, I concluded to come in this direction, and pay you a nautical visit."

"I'm glad ye did, for it's thunderin' dull in this neighborhood. Git out o' yer craft an' come up to the cave," said Bill.

"Oh, it isn't worth while, Bill," replied Kirke. "I can see you all here, and a dangerous appearance you present with your firearms. Besides, I feel lazy. Have you anything to drink?"

"Yes, some derned good old rye, that came from some old feller's still-house last week. Sam go up and bring down the jug; yer young and nimble."

Samuel proceeded to ascend to the cave, in whose dark recesses dwelt the jug in question.

It may not be out of place to state here a fact of which many of our readers are probably not aware, namely, that half a century ago almost every farmer in that part of Pennsylvania had a small distillery on his farm, in which he manufactured, mostly for his own use, rye whisky, apple brandy, etc. A still-house was as common on a farm at that time as a barn, and regarded as almost equally indispensable. That custom has entirely disappeared now, and where the little distillery once stood, only a heap of stones now remains to mark the spot.

Sam returned in the course of five minutes, bearing in his hand the two-gallon jug.

"There," said he, as he set it down, "it nearly cost me my neck to bring it down; it's chuck full."

"Why did you not pour some into another vessel?" asked Philip.

"Darned if I ever thought of it till I got half-way down,' was the reply.

"Did you bring anything to drink from?"

"Yes, hurs som'in' 'at'll hold as much as any feller 'll drink at a swaller," replied the illiterate Sam, producing a tin-cup whose capacity was a pint and a half.

Philip took a drink, and was followed by Bill, Sam, Joe, and the "Busters," after which the conversation was resumed.

"Have you any enterprise in view?" asked Philip.

"No, nothing," was Bill's reply. "Business seems to be dull. Have *you* got anything on hand? Is anybody travelin' these times with a pocket full, or anything o' that sort?"

"Why I know of one pretty good affair that might receive your attention with some advantage," said Philip.

"What is it?"

"If you will only come to the village—"

Bill started.

"Oh, there's nothing to fear, if you will but follow my directions. I know a man in Weston who has a thousand dollars or so, which can easily be got at with the aid of one of your fine bolt-saws, a dark lantern, and a bunch of keys. All these things you have in the cave?"

"Yes."

"Well, the man I allude to keeps a store in the village. I have learned that he is very careless with his money, keeping it in a mere wooden drawer under his counter, that is only secured at night with a common little lock. His theory is, as I have heard him express it, that the more careful one is of money the more apt he is to lose it. Now it would be a benefit to him and the world in general, if we were to teach him a lesson which would clearly prove the fallacy of his reasoning. By the way, his name is Duffey, and he is no

other than the venerable father of one of the young men who thwarted you last September in your attempt to relieve the New Market man of his lucre, and came near getting you hanged at the village."

"He is?"

"Yes, the very same. By relieving the father of a little cash you will in a manner repay the son for his interference, and recover, perhaps, what you lost that night. You will not incur the slightest risk. All you have to do is to come at about twelve o'clock in the night, for then there is not a soul awake in the whole village, and proceed quietly and cautiously."

"I'm in for it!" said Bill, with some enthusiasm, for the spirits he had taken were beginning to have an exhilarating effect upon his own.

"So am I," said Sam.

"Me, too," said Joe.

"And us, too," said the two brothers, in concert.

"Three of you will be enough," said Philip. "The other two can remain at the cave. You, Bill, will be one of the party that goes on the expedition."

"Yes, indeed. Would n't miss it."

"Well, as the Busters went with you on the last affair of importance, I think Sam and Joe had better go this time."

All signified their assent to this arrangement.

"Now," resumed Philip, "let me advise you how to proceed. Come as near twelve o'clock as possible, any night you choose. I think to-night would be as suitable as any, for the weather promises to be fair, and it will be dark enough, and the moon will not be up till about three o'clock, and—"

"Let it be to-night, then," interrupted Bill.

"That'll suit me," said Sam.

"An' me," added Joe.

"Very well," said Philip. "You know where Tony Baily's house is, Bill?"

"Who's?"

"The tavern, you know, where—"

"I reckon I ort to, an' I rather think I'll never forgit it."

"Well, Duffey's store is nearly opposite; you will have no difficulty in finding it. As the door is both locked and barred at night, you will have to enter by one of the windows. I do not remember that there are any articles to obstruct you when once you get the shutter open. Take with you a saw that will cut iron, a dark-lantern, and a bunch of keys to open the drawer with. You can soon saw the head off one of the bolts that hold the bar across the outside of the shutters. That done, all you have to do is to raise the sash and enter, with your keys and lantern. While you are within, Sam and Joe can watch outside, though it is scarcely necessary. You can easily find the drawer by the light of your lantern; open it, and in a back apartment you will find the money. It is gold and silver, in bags that will hold about a pint each. I have often seen Duffey go to this drawer to get change out. Be as noiseless as a cat when you are in the store, and you are perfectly safe. No one sleeps in the store-room, but the family all sleep in the same building. The proprietor himself occupies a room immediately adjoining and your friend, his son, reposes on the floor above. Now, I think I have told you all that is necessary, and I have no doubt you will succeed nicely."

"You may bet your head we will."

"Very well. To-night, then, is the time. As I cannot render you any assistance in the matter," said Philip, with a sly wink, "I will probably be asleep at the time, in common with the rest of the honest people. So, let us take another drink, and I'll be off."

Again all had recourse to the jug, when the discreet Bill said:—

"Don't shove out yit, captain, till I go up a little way an' see if the coast's clear."

"A good idea; I'll wait," returned Philip.

Bill climbed up among the rocks to the height of seventy or eighty feet, and took a careful survey of the placid surface of the river as far as he could see up and down the stream.

"It's all safe," he said, when he returned; "but when you move out I advise you to hug the shore a piece up, an' don't shoot right out onto the river, for somebody *might* happen to be stuck away among the bushes on t'other side, and seein' ye slidin' out might set him a wonderin' where ye come from."

"I'll be careful as to that," replied Philip. "But stop, I'm not off yet. I have another suggestion to make."

"What is it?" asked Bill.

"Why, how would it do to go up in our boat to-night, instead of walking?"

"I never thought o' that, I declare," replied Bill, rather pleased with the idea. "Now, I don't see why it wouldn't do."

"I think it would be best," said Philip. "I advise you to go in the boat, but don't forget to muffle the oars. You can then row past the village and land above. Tie your boat where you can easily find it again, and thus you will approach the village from the other side. Should an alarm be given, which is not likely, and should you find it necessary to make a hasty retreat, you could hurry to the boat and embark, thus deceiving your pursuers, should you have any, as to the direction in which you belong. That will be the best part of it. That cursed Roland and his crowd will then spend the next half-year in scouring the country for miles above the village. Once in the boat, push out into the stream, and the current will soon carry you right down past the village, while a lot of fools are breaking their necks running far up the river road in search of you. I merely mention all this to prepare you for any emergency, and not that I think it at all probable that you will be seen or disturbed to-night. Duffey will swear a little to-morrow when he comes into his

store, and finds himself not so rich by a thousand or so as when he went to bed."

"Good! I think we'll go it on your plan. What d'ye say, fellers?"

"It's bully, I think," was Sam's brief comment.

"The werry thing," agreed Joe.

"Then," said Bill, "it's settled, an' if we don't have a grab at ole what-ye-call-em's cash afore to-morrer mornin' then you may consider as we're poor stuff."

"Good-by then," said Philip, "and don't forget the directions I have given you."

"Trust me for that. Good-by."

Philip shoved his boat from the snug little harbor, and was soon ascending the river. For at least a mile he kept very close to the Fayette county shore, so that at times he was actually hid beneath the thick foliage that overhung the water at various points. Such caution on his part was scarcely necessary, for the opposite shore was also high, rocky, wild, and covered with woods, and it was, therefore, most improbable that any one was lurking in a position to observe him. It has been most truly said:—

> "The guilty conscience groundless terror brings—
> Gives fearful shape to harmless, lifeless things,
> Silence or sound regards with equal fright,
> Flees from the day, yet dreads the coming night—
> Trembles in darkness, while it dare not face the light."

CHAPTER XIV.

MAGGIE ROSS.

At eleven o'clock that day Mr. Duffey, the village merchant, little dreaming of the evil that was concocting against him, was sitting quietly, half-lazily, in an old arm-chair in his store-room. There was not a customer in the store, indeed he did not expect many at this time of year. The farmers, who were now busy "working" their corn for the first time in the season, had purchased their summer's goods earlier in the spring. Times were consequently dull with the village merchant, and would continue so until after harvest.

By and by it crossed Mr. Duffey's mind that he held a note for some sixty dollars on a man in New Market, which had come due on the first of the month.

"Strange," he muttered, "that Wilkins has not brought that money over yet. He has been very punctual heretofore. Something may be wrong. I have half a mind to pay him a visit and see about it. Men are not half so apt to travel a dozen miles to pay money as they are to receive it. I've discovered *that* in my little researches into human nature. However, Mr. Wilkins is good enough. Oh, dear," Mr. Duffey yawned, rising slowly from his chair and stretching himself, "I feel lazy to-day. Got the spring fever. Symptoms unmistakable. Times are dull to-day. Farmers busy. Oh, dear." Here Mr. Duffey executed another agonizing yawn. "I could n't stand it to ride to New Market to-day, now that I come to think of it. I'd drop off my horse and go to sleep at the roadside. Oh!"—brightening up—"I know what I'll do! I'll send John; that is if he is to be

found. He will just like a ride such a day as this. John! I say, John! Where is that fellow?"

"Here I am," responded John, at that moment entering from the street.

"Well, get a piece of chalk, and—"

"And what?" John interrupted, in surprise.

"Make a long mark some where, for this is the first time I ever found you when I wanted you," said the father, good-humoredly.

"Why, I'm such a useless fellow, you know, that I did n't suppose I could ever be wanted. Is it possible that I can be of any service?"

"Why, yes; you can make yourself a little useful to-day. How would you like a ride to New Market?"

"I should enjoy it exceedingly this delightful day, and if that will benefit you in the least, I will start at once; so good-by, and—"

"But stop," interrupted Mr. Duffey, "I want you to do more than ride there and back. I want you to take a note on Mr. Wilkins and collect it. You know him, do n't you?"

"Yes, I know him right well."

"Then saddle your pony, and I'll get the note."

John went to the stable, while Mr. Duffey hunted up the bit of paper which contained Mr. Wilkins's name for sixty dollars. The young man soon reappeared at the door, mounted upon his pony.

"I say, father?" he called out.

"I 'm coming—I have it now," responded Mr. Duffey.

"I suppose he will pay it without any trouble?"

"Yes, if you find him at home, you will have no difficulty in collecting it."

"It won't be necessary to lick him, or any thing of that sort?" suggested John.

"Oh, go on," said Mr. Duffey. "And remember one thing—do n't stay two days, as you did when I sent you to Brownsville last summer; on the contrary, I want you to get

back early this evening. Remember, my positive orders are that you return by eight or nine o'clock, at the latest; you can easily do it."

"Oh, I'll be back by seven, you may depend," said John, as he rode away in the direction of the ferry.

"If you are back by twelve, to-night," muttered Mr. Duffey to himself, "you will be unusually punctual." And he re-entered his store, resumed his seat in the arm-chair, and actually fell asleep.

Now, if ever a young man meant to keep his word, John Duffey probably did when he promised to return from New Market by seven o'clock. What followed, however, proved clearly that man is a mere creature of circumstances—and of pretty ones, too, sometimes.

He reached New Market, without mishap, found Mr. Wilkins easily, and presented the note. Mr. W. paid it cheerfully, begging John to tell the "old man" that he was sorry he had put him to the trouble of sending over, that he had been intending to go over and pay the bill every day for the past three weeks, but that something had "turned up" continually to cause him to "put it off;" and that he would surely have gone over to Weston on the following day, having most irrevocably "made up his mind" to that effect an hour before.

John assured him that it was not of the slightest consequence; that he came over for the ride more than any thing else, and that he was glad to have an excuse to get to New Market. After some conversation on trifling matters, John mounted his horse and was riding away, when Mr. Wilkins called out:

"Oh, I say, Duffey!"

John returned to the gate by which Mr. Wilkins stood, and intimated that he was ready to hear what that gentleman had to say.

"Why, you have a very warm friend in this place—did you know it?" said Mr. Wilkins.

"Who is it?" asked John.

"Mr. Ross. I understood that you were one of the two young men from Weston who rescued him from several highwaymen in September last."

"Why, yes; Will Hempstead, a friend of mine, and myself took sides with him when we saw he was fighting no less than three of the robbers. I always like to see fair play. Now, three to one, you know, is a mighty mean thing."

"You ought to call on Mr. Ross. I have heard him speak of you so often. He will be very glad to see you."

"Oh, I dread to meet him again," John replied, "for he nearly smothered us with thanks that night. I am afraid he would commence it again. I'd die if he should, I know."

"But you should call, by all means, urged Mr. Wilkins, and get acquainted with his family. They are all most agreeable people. Besides, he has a very pretty daughter. On your way from town you 'll pass his house; I can point it out from here; it is that brick house just on that little hill yonder—white palings in front, and—"

"Yes, I see."

"His store," continued Mr. Wilkins, "is a hundred yards up this street. He is at his house now, I know, for I saw him pass in that direction a little while before you. Now, if he hears you were in town, he 'll be very much put out because you did n't stop and see him. Do so, won't you?"

"I'll see about it," replied John, who had not the most distant notion of stopping; "so, good-by."

"Good-by. Respects to the old man."

And John rode away.

The residence of Mr. Ross was a neat two-story brick house, standing upon a gentle eminence just without the town, and near the Weston road. As John arrived opposite the house, he observed a middle-aged man standing by the gate which opened into the little lawn in front of the house. Not doubting that it was Mr. Ross, he merely bade him a good afternoon, and passed on, mentally observing:

"Glad he didn t recognize me!"

But at that very moment the voice of the man at the gate startled him with:

"Young man!"

"Sir?" responded Duffey, halting.

"Yes, I'm not mistaken," said the gentleman, walking out upon the road. "It is you."

"Pardon me," replied John, "but I do assure you that you are mistaken. It is not I."

"Yes, it is," retorted Mr. Ross, laughing. "You are one of the young men with whom I became so opportunely acquainted one night last September. Come, now, don't deny it, for I remember you quite well. Only think, you were going right out of town without calling. So, get off your horse, come in and stay till after supper, at least. Your horse shall be taken care of. My wife and daughter will be glad to see you, and—"

"But really, sir—"

"No excuse. I know your voice well. You and your companion did me a great favor last fall; now you do me another by coming in and making yourself at home. I'll hold your horse while you dismount." And Mr. Ross actually seized the bridle.

"I see there is no help for it," said John, dismounting, "but really—"

"No protestations—"

"But let me at least beg you not to mention to your family who I am till after I have departed. I don't want to be lionized. It is so confusing, and —"

"Oh, never fear," interrupted Mr. Ross, ominously.

Calling a lad who was at the stable-yard, a little way off, Mr. Ross gave the animal in his charge, with instructions to give it water and feed; after which John was conducted into the house.

"Let me see," said Mr. Ross, as he ushered his guest into

a neat and clean, though not splendid, parlor, "your name is either Duffey, or Hempstead: which is it?"

"Duffey."

"Then your companion's name was Hempstead?"

"Yes, sir."

"Pray be seated a moment," said Mr. Ross, as he left the little parlor to go in quest of Mrs. and Miss R.

"Oh, ye fates!" sighed John, as he threw himself into one chair, and his hat into another. "What have I done that I shou'd suffer so? Here I am in my worst suit, my hair not combed since morning, my face and hands none of the cleanest, my cravat not half tied, a coarse shirt on, my boots all dirty, and my pants wrinkled at the bottoms, and in a few minutes, no doubt, I am to stand in the presence of Mr. Ross's beautiful daughter! Oh, why was I ever born? I wish she would n't happen to be at home. No, I do n't either. I *would* like to see her, now that I come to think. Hark! I hear them coming! Oh, face, be brass! Oh, heart, be steel!"

Mr. Ross re-entered, accompanied by an amiable-looking, middle-aged lady; and a pretty, rosy-cheeked, bright-eyed, dark-haired girl of eighteen, whom he presented to "Mr. Duffey, his rescuer," as his wife and daughter.

"You are welcome, Mr. Duffey," said Mrs. Ross, advancing as the young man arose, and taking his hand. "I am truly happy to know you at last, for I have earnestly desired to see you ever since I learned of your brave conduct. We shall never cease to remember you gratefully."

"I beg you will not speak of it," replied John. "My friend and I only did what no true man would fail to do in the same case. You must not give me more credit than I deserve."

"Bravery and modesty always go together," said Miss Ross, as she took the young man by the hand. "You would try to convince us that we do not owe you a lasting obligation. At the risk of your own life, you have saved one that

is invaluable to us; and should we ever come to look lightly upon it, we should be unworthy of your friendship. We will always love you and your brave friend for what you have done, no matter what you say."

As Duffey looked into those grateful eyes, he felt that were their owner inclined to "love" him, he would not certainly "say" anything to prevent her.

The evening was approaching, and after a little time the ladies, excusing themselves, left Mr. Ross to entertain their guests, while they set about preparing supper.

"You have not seen all my family yet," said Mr. Ross, when he and his guest were alone. "I have a son, whom we call Tom, and who is about your age. He is absent now. I am sorry he is not here."

"I should have been glad to see him," returned Duffey. "Does he assist in your store?"

"Not often. His ideas do not seem to run in the business channel. He wishes to become a lawyer, and but lately I have consented that he should begin his studies with that view. I am sorry now that he did not begin five years earlier, since it is evident that nothing but a professional life will satisfy him; but I fondly hoped to make a business man of him, that he might fill my place in a few years."

"Of course, then, you employ a clerk?"

"Yes, I have a faithful and honest one, with whose services I would find it difficult to dispense. He is a married man, resides near the store, and is always at his post."

Mr. Ross and his guest conversed on various topics till supper was announced, when they proceeded to the dining-room. John began to feel quite at home in the presence of his new friends. He liked Mr. Ross very much, was highly pleased with Mrs. Ross, and as for Miss Ross—why, she was positively interesting to him.

When supper was over, and the two men had returned to the little parlor, Mr. Ross said:

"Mr. Duffey, make yourself comfortable; I am obliged to

go to the store for half an hour; meantime I will send one of the ladies in to keep you company." [Duffey wondered which one it would be.]

"I should be on my way to Weston soon," Duffey returned.

"Oh, do not be in a hurry. What is to prevent you from staying all night? I have plenty of room—"

"Oh, I *must* go home this evening. I am expected, and should I remain away all night, some anxiety would prevail at home."

"At least, I will find you here when I return," said Mr. Ross. "An hour will make but little difference to you."

"Yes, I will wait till you return."

Mr. Ross left the parlor, and a few minutes later the handsome daughter entered. The youthful pair soon began to feel acquainted, and they passed an hour right happily together. Within that hour Duffey disovered that the fair young lady's Christian name was Maggie (he had always admired that name); and Miss Ross, on her part, learned that the name of her lively young guest was John—a plain, honest name. There was no uncalled-for restraint upon their conversation; and they talked affably together, of various matters, as sensible young folks will.

Mr. Ross remained away a great deal longer than he had anticipated, being unavoidably detained; and before John was aware of it, he had actually spent the evening in the pleasant little parlor. Candles had been lighted in the meantime, and he had examined some pretty pictures and interesting books, which were shown him by his companion.

"What, nine o'clock!" he exclaimed, as the tall, old-fashioned clock in the corner unceremoniously chimed forth that hour. "Why, how quickly the time has passed!"

[It always does when one is perfectly comfortable.]

"That is not late," said Miss Maggie.

"It is late for me not to be on my way home."

"You had better stay to-night. Indeed, I wish you

would, for," said Maggie, manifesting evident concern, "it may not be safe to travel so late."

"Oh, there is nothing to fear," replied John, carelessly. "I hear some one coming through the gate; is it your father?"

"I think it is," replied Miss Ross, peering from the window; "but it is so dark that—yes, it is he; I know his walk."

A moment later Mr. Ross entered the parlor.

"I was detained at the store longer than I had expected to be," he apologized; "but I hope you have enjoyed yourself."

"Oh, yes, sir; I have spent the evening quite pleasantly. I would be glad to stay longer had I not so far to go to-night."

"Can I not prevail on you to stay till morning?"

"I thank you; but I must go."

"If you are determined, I will get your horse."

"If you please," said John.

While Mr. Ross went to the stable, Mrs. R. came into the parlor. It was so dark without that it required fifteen minutes or more to saddle and bridle the horse. When it was announced that the animal was ready, Duffey took his leave, and walked toward the gate.

"You must not think of making this your last visit," called out both mother and daughter, as he reached the road.

"You will come and see us again by all means, now that you are acquainted," added Mr. Ross.

"I will not forget your kindness and hospitality," replied Duffey; "and I promise you that I will never come to New Market without calling on you—if you don't get tired of me."

"No fear of that. You must get acquainted with Tom; you will probably find him at home next time."

"I will be glad to know him. So, you will see me again. Till then, good-by."

"Good-by—and a safe journey."

And the young man rode rapidly away.

It would be no exaggeration to say that John Duffey thought of Miss Maggie Ross more than once during his lonely ride. Nor would we hazard our reputation for veracity were we to assert that the latter thought of the gallant young man at least once or twice that night after he had gone, and several times every day for many ensuing weeks.

CHAPTER XV.

THE DELINQUENT SON.

It was nearly midnight when John Duffey, after his lonely ride, found himself at the Monongahela River, opposite Weston. As the ferryman resided on the Weston side, the chances of arousing him at that solemn hour of the night appeared rather slim. Now, what was he to do?—remain in Greene county all night? He might as well have stayed at the house of Mr. Ross, where—oh, dear! Several times he was on the point of yelling out at the top of his voice, in the hope of awaking the sleeping ferryman; but then he thought how futile such a proceeding would be, and how foolish it would be to exhaust his lungs in a hopeless enterprise.

"Ah, I have it!" he suddenly exclaimed. "I'll take somebody's skiff, which I can return in the morning, and I'll row across and make pony swim. He can do it easily. I'll tie the bridle to the boat."

John found a skiff near the wharf, and with considerable difficulty put his plan into execution. He was near drowning his favorite animal in the operation, for in the darkness he

missed the landing on the Fayette county side, striking the steep bank some rods below. With ready tact, however, he turned the boat up stream, and soon after had the satisfaction of leading the almost exhausted animal up the wharf.

The quiet which reigned in the village was only equaled by the darkness which hung about it. While there was not a sound to be heard, there was not a light to be seen, and but for the stars that twinkled above, it would have been difficult to ascertain optically that there was any village there.

Groping and feeling his way about, aided by many familiar landmarks, Duffey within a quarter of an hour lodged his panting horse in the stable. That done, he proceeded to the house, and after a little unpleasant pounding upon the back door, succeeded in awaking a younger brother, who arose, let him in, and immediately returned to his dreams.

Weary after his exertion, John ascended to his room over the store, divested himself of his raiment, tumbled into bed, and in ten minutes more would no doubt have been dreaming of *somebody;* but just then his ear caught the sound of stealthy footsteps and suppressed voices in the street beneath his window. In a moment his weariness and drowsiness left him, and he was all attention. Going to the window, he cautiously raised the sash and peeped out. He could barely make out several dark forms below, and he distinctly heard a few whispered words. Presently a low, grating sound struck his ear, and the truth flashed upon him—that thieves were at work trying to force open one of the windows with a view to robbing the store. He immediately groped his way to a shelf in a distant corner of the room, where he always kept a loaded horse-pistol, in view of such emergency; and with that instrument in his hand he returned to his post and listened.

There could be no doubt of the intentions of the nocturnal adventurers at the lower window. A saw or file was at work on the iron bolt, and it was cutting its way through with a slight sound, which only the stillness of the night rendered

audible. He could hear whispering occasionally. The first voice he heard—and it was a strange one to him—asked:—

"Ha'n't ye got the darned thing sawed through yit?"

"Poorty near," replied a voice, which even in its whisper sounded gruff, and which the listener imagined he had heard somewhere. "Are ye sure the lantern 's all fixed?"

"Yes, that's certain," was the reply.

A dozen times more the saw was drawn back and forth across the iron bolt, then a slight snap announced that it had walked through.

"There, it's off," whispered the gruff voice; "let the bar down easy. There. Now, if the darned shetter do n't skreech—"

At this moment John Duffey, thinking himself one of the most reasonable and indulgent of fellows for having allowed the rascals to proceed thus far, deliberately called out:—

"Gentlemen, as you will find it difficult to get in there, because of a few trifling shelves that obstruct the window, I would respectfully suggest that, if you are in no particular hurry, you wait one moment, and I will come down and open the door."

It would be impossible, in words, to do justice to the effect this singular and unlooked-for address had upon the startled ruffians. Had the sudden voice shouted, "Murder! Help! Thieves! Robbers!" or any thing of that sort, they would have rushed away with a unanimity of purpose and action that would have been interesting to the beholder; but to be greeted in that cool, complacent, familiar, matter-of-course style, struck them with dumb, silent, motionless confusion. They doubted whether they had heard aright—whether they had heard anything at all—whether they were awake—whether they were alive; and there they stood, without speaking, or moving, or seeing, or hearing, or feeling, for the space of ten seconds, when the click of a firelock brought them to their senses. Then suddenly realizing the danger that threatened them, they sprang away up the street, with

every muscle strained to the highest pitch, and darted off into the darkness, dropping a saw, a file, a bunch of keys, a dark lantern, a hat, a cap, a knife, or a pistol at every bound.

Bang! went the heavy horse-pistol, breaking cruelly upon the stillness of the night, and jarring every pane of glass in the village, while three or four ill-shapen slugs went whizzing after the flying robbers, whose footsteps soon died away toward the upper end of the village. Hurriedly drawing on his boots and "incomprehensibilities," Duffey rushed down stairs with a view to pursuing them. All the family had been aroused by the report of the pistol, and to their eager inquiries he replied in half-a-dozen words, then ran out and over to Tony Baily's, where he fired the little cannon, as a signal for the assembling of the thief-hunters. Its loud echoes startled many a sleeper from his dreams, and in ten minutes a score of George Roland's "rangers" were collected at the tavern, himself among them, who, after a word of explanation from Duffey, started in pursuit of the robbers. The darkness was so great that they could scarcely hope to succeed in capturing any of the villains, who could easily take to the woods or fields at any point, and thus elude them. The party went a few miles up the road, which was a narrow country road that followed the river, and at last returned from their fruitless chase.

Meanwhile, Bill and his companions returned to their boat, which they had left above the village, re-embarked, pushed out into the current, and floated quietly down the river. When they got below the village, they took their oars and fell to rowing for dear life. They were happy to escape unhurt, and yet they could not help feeling dissatisfied with the result of their adventure; for, besides being unsuccessful in an attempt to secure valuable booty, their nervous systems had encountered a shock which it would require several days of perfect quiet, and a number of quarts of "old rye," to allay. Nor was this all. They had lost, beyond hope of recovery, some of their most useful professional implements, to

say nothing of sundry hats, for every man had lost, in his hurry and flurry, the valuable "tile" from his head.

There was no more sleeping done in Weston that night. The excited villagers soon learned that a most daring robbery had been attempted in their midst (which, by the way, developed the interesting fact that the outlaws were not banished from the neighborhood); and the male portion flocked to the scene of the intended burglary, and saw with their own eyes the severed bolt, the half-opened window, and the keys, house-breaking implements, weapons, and stray hats which lay scattered about.

When the young men returned from their unsuccessful pursuit, Mr. Duffey called his son in and requested him to relate the particulars. Thereupon the young man told his father how he had overstayed his time at New Market, a few hours merely; what a time of it he had had crossing the river, and how he had arrived home, been admitted by his brother, gone up stairs to his room only a few minutes before the arrival of the thieves; how he had interrupted them, fired on them with his horse-pistol, and how delightfully they had scampered away.

"Thus, father," said he, in conclusion, "you see that had I come home early in the evening, as you would have scolded me for failing to do had not this affair happened, I would have been in bed and sound asleep at the time the robbers came, and they would certainly have succeeded. But by staying at New Market till nearly ten o'clock, contrary to your express orders, I arrived home just about midnight, was wide awake when they came, and thus prevented you from being robbed. You see what a blessed thing it is to have a disobedient and undutiful son!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DREAM.

"So, to-morrow is the day appointed for the picnic at the White Rocks, is it not?" asked Aunt Eliza, as the family of Ira Tate sat down to supper on a beautiful evening in June.

"Yes, to-morrow is the day," Mary replied; "and it promises to be a fair one."

"I suppose you are both going?" ventured Aunt Eliza, addressing Mary and Tilly jointly.

"Yes," replied Matilda, "we are to join the party when they arrive here, and of course we will, if father will give his consent and let us have the horses."

Ira, who had an hour before killed a beautiful guinea fowl in the farm-yard, because he ran a splinter in his hand while climbing the fence, did not reply. *His* silence, however, was always considered equivalent to assent.

"We shall miss the best part of the ride," said Mary. "I am sorry that I cannot start from the village with the party, as I used to when I lived near."

"*I* think," said Aunt Eliza, "you possess several valuable advantages by residing here. Three at least."

"What are they?" inquired Mary.

"Why, in the first place," said Aunt Eliza, "you will not be obliged to get ready so early."

"Well, what else? though I don't mind that."

"Why," continued Aunt Eliza, "you will not be so likely to get belated on your return."

"That is true. The last time I accompanied a party to the White Rocks we stayed there till nearly sunset, and the

consequence was that it was after nine o'clock when I got home."

"Yes," replied Aunt Eliza, "and uneasy enough I was about you."

"But what other advantage?" asked Mary.

"The third," replied Aunt Eliza, with an air of wisdom, "is the greatest of all."

"Why, what can it be?"

"Can you not guess?"

"No, I am sure I can not."

"Then I will tell you: By leaving the party here, as they return, you escape from the odious society of the *men* the sooner."

"Oh, dear me, Aunt," said Mary, laughing, "I think that is one of the *dis*-advantages."

"And I," Tilly agreed.

"So you may think now," responded Aunt Eliza, "but when you are my age—listen!"

They were taking supper in the kitchen at the rear of the building, and at that moment the vigorous barking of the dog in front of the house attracted their attention.

"Some one is coming! I'll go and see who it is," said Mary, arising and leaving the kitchen.

On entering a front room, she glanced from the open door, and saw George Roland coming up the path.

"Why, is it you, George? (Get out, Jack!) How do you do? (You, Jack!) You are quite a stranger. (Jack, you rascal!) How have you been (Jack, stop your noise!) for so long, and where?" said Mary, addressing alternately the visitor and the dog.

"It *is* I. I have been quite well, thank you, and at home," replied George, answering all her queries in a breath. "I am glad to see you looking so well;" and then, without the slightest warning, by look or gesture, or the briefest preface in words, he informed Mary that it was a "fine evening."

"It is, indeed," Mary replied. "But come in."

"No, thank you; it is growing late, and I must hurry home. I had an errand in the neighborhood, and one of Tilly's friends requested me to carry a note to her. It is something relating to the party, I think. Will you please give it her?" and George produced a folded paper.

"I will call her—"

"No; I am sure you can be trusted with it," interrupted George, laughing.

"But *will* you not come in?" said Mary, taking the note.

"No; as I said before, it is getting late. I did not even tie my horse. You see him standing in the road by the gate. He seems impatient to be off. How are all the family?—your aunt, your cousin, and your honest old uncle?"

"All quite well, and would be delighted to see you—"

"Except your aunt, who, I know, don't like me any too well," interrupted George.

"I can't say that," Mary replied. "But they are at supper; and I think you might come in and join them."

"No, I must be off at once," replied George, who did not feel at ease in Mary's presence. "Therefore—"

"*You* will be of the party to-morrow?" interrupted Mary.

"Oh, yes," replied George; "but there was a time when you would not have found it necessary to ask me that. However, that is gone. Yes, I am going, and Kitty Hempstead is to be my companion."

"Kitty is an agreeable girl," suggested Mary.

"By all means," George rejoined.

"I expect you two will strike up a match yet."

"If we do," replied George, prophetically, "it will be after to-day."

"It might not be *very long* after," Mary retorted.

"There is no knowing. *You* are going to the White Rocks, of course?" said George.

"I may possibly," was the reply.

"Or, rather, you shall, probably," suggested George.

"Why, I cannot be sure, for—in fact, it may rain."

"Exactly. Well, good-evening."

"Good-evening; and thanks, on behalf of Tilly for your kindness in—"

"Don't mention it," interrupted George; and he walked to the gate, mounted his horse, and rode away, while Mary returned to the homely dining-room.

"Who was it?" asked Aunt Eliza.

"George Roland."

"A good young fellow," gravely remarked Ira, half to himself; after which he relapsed into the most imperturbable silence.

"Has he gone?" asked Aunt Eliza.

"Yes; just gone."

"Why, what did he want?"

"Only to leave a note for Tilly—here it is," replied Mary, giving her cousin the neatly-folded paper.

That tender maiden blushed as she recognized in the address that bold, don't-care-a-straw-for-anybody hand-writing of—Ned.

"From some young fellow, no doubt," ventured Aunt Eliza.

"It is merely a note from one of my Weston friends, requesting Mary and me to join the party here to-morrow morning at half-past ten," replied Tilly, evasively.

"Oh, these parties!" exclaimed Aunt Eliza. "The young folks are going mad. We hear nothing but talk of parties. When I was a girl, such things were not thought of."

"But people have had time to grow wiser since then," mildly suggested Mary.

"Rather say foolisher," retorted Aunt Eliza, without perceiving this hit at her age, which was probably innocently enough given by her niece.

After supper Tilly called Mary aside, and said:

"Mary, George Roland didn't chance to tell you whom this note was from, did he?"

"No; and I did n't ask him. Why?"

"Because; can you guess whom it is from?"

"I might, perhaps, but—"

"Well, not to keep you in suspense, it is from *somebody*," said Tilly, with significant emphasis.

"That," said Mary, "means Ned St—"

"Hush! Aunt will hear you!" cautioned Tilly.

"I am right then, am I?"

"Why—I—I—y—yes," Tilly replied, confusedly.

"And what does he say of the party?" asked Mary, who felt sure there was a word in it for her.

"He says that we are respectfully requested to hold ourselves in readiness to-morrow at half-past ten; and that not only *somebody*, but also *somebody else*, will be with the party," said Tilly, gazing meaningly into her cousin's face.

"Whom do you mean by that?" asked Mary, just as if she did n't know.

"You are so good at guessing," replied Tilly, "that I think you need hardly ask. You guessed one; can you not guess the other?"

"How should I?" retorted Mary; whose tone, however, clearly betrayed the fact that she could *form an idea* as to who it was.

"Well, then it 's Phil—"

"Hush! Aunt will hear," Mary interrupted.

Her cousin laughed.

"Here," she said, giving Mary the missive, "read it for yourself; there are no secrets in it."

Mary took it, and read as follows:

"WESTON, June 9th, —.

"MISS MATILDA TATE—

"RESPECTED AND ESTEEMED LADY:

"George Roland informs me that he has occasion to visit your immediate neighborhood, and I have asked him to be the bearer of this note. (Pardon me for taking the

liberty of addressing you in writing). Arrangements have been made for a grand picnic at the White Rocks to-morrow. Phil Kirke and I expect to accompany the party; but we have no female companions here. We therefore earnestly hope that, if you and your cousin, Miss Mary White, will pardon our presumption and consent to accompany us, we will not be companionless. The party, all mounted of course, will reach your father's house at half-past ten o'clock, when it is hoped you will be ready to join us.

"Very sincerely your—your—friend,

"NED."

"So that is the arrangement," observed Mary.

"Yes, and a good one. I am glad our friends at the village do not forget us," Tilly replied.

"I hope the day will be fair," said Mary.

"Oh, it would be *too* bad if it should rain."

"Not much danger of it," resumed Mary, "for it rained only yesterday, and probably will not again for a week."

"True. Oh, it *will* be a nice day, I know."

That night the cousins, who slept in the same room, retired before nine o'clock, in order to be up early in the morning; but as they naturally fell to talking just a little of the morrow and its probable enjoyment, it was past ten ere they closed their eyes.

It was very quiet there by the mountain. The moon, which was now in its useless stage, had risen during the day, and it went down about nine o'clock, leaving the valley wrapped in thick darkness. The tall mountains hard by looked gloomily down upon the lower earth, as if enjoining silence. The solemn cry of the owl was heard occasionally, the monotonous notes of the whippoorwill, or the rustling of a leaf as the bat flitted among the branches of the old oak; but these sounds seemed only to deepen the gloom and solitude of the night.

Mary dreamed of the party ere she awoke. She dreamed

that the morning had come; that the horses were ready at the gate for herself and cousin, and that they were awaiting the approach of the party. But the morning seemed to wear away, hour after hour glided by, and the party did not come. Noon came and went, the afternoon wore away, night approached, the sun went down fiery red, and they had not yet come. All the while Mary imagined that she was waiting patiently, not doubting they would come yet. Sure enough, when it had grown dark, they came, and Mary and her cousin mounted their horses. When they were about to move away, the father of Mary—whom she imagined to be still alive—came rushing into the road, seized the bridle of the horse, and trembling as with anger, and looking upon her as he had never done before, forbade her to go. But Philip Kirke struck him a blow upon the head and felled him to the ground; whereupon the whole party galloped away; and the next instant the scene was shifted, and they were at the White Rocks. But the darkness had now grown intense, heavy clouds gathered over, and a furious storm burst forth. The lurid glare of the lightning was blinding, and the roll of the thunder deafening; while rain and hail poured from the angry heavens, and threatened to wash the very mountains away. All had dismounted and assembled upon the high rock; and while they stood huddled together in awe of the storm, a fearful howling noise was heard on the mountain above them. Louder and nearer it grew, till it seemed on the point of rolling down upon them. "It is a hurricane!" screamed several of the party, in terror, and a general rush was made toward where the horses stood. But Mary was struck motionless, and stood on the White Rocks, alone in the darkness and in the storm. With a mad fury a great wind came sweeping down the mountain, tearing up the trees and scattering them about. On it came, and as it reached Mary, she was blown like a feather toward the brink of the precipice. She shouted and screamed, but in the awful tumult of the storm she could not hear her own voice.

Nearer and nearer she was borne to the frightful precipice by the merciless winds, a moment she struggled on the brink, then was swept over. As she descended, a black cloud that hung over opened, and within it she saw her angry father, and in that awful instant heard him cry in a voice louder than the storm:

"Oh, Mary! Heedless girl! Why did you come to the White Rocks?"

Then, screaming in reality, she sprang from her pillow to meet with her opening eyes the early morning sun that was shining gloriously in through the window.

"Why, what on earth is the matter?" exclaimed Tilly, starting from her own dreams at the sound of her cousin's voice.

"Only a dream," said Mary, trembling.

"How you screamed! It must have been a scary vision."

"Did I scream?"

"Yes. What were you dreaming of?"

"Oh, nothing of any consequence. I see it is morning; let us get up. I wonder how late it is?"

"Rather say how early," replied Tilly; "for the sun is barely up. It cannot be more than five."

The girls arose. It was not an unusual thing, nor is it now, for country people to arise at five or earlier. Such a custom, accompanied by early retiring, might be adopted, with great advantage, by all, both in the country and in the city. What mental, moral, or physical advantage is derived by retiring at twelve, one, or two, and arising at nine or ten, has never been clearly demonstrated.

Mary raised the window-sash and looked out. If her dream had cast any gloom over her, the beauties of that summer morning would surely have been capable of dispelling it. Early as it was, the birds were singing merrily. The dew hung so heavily on every green leaf that it looked as if a shower had visited the earth. Not a cloud was to be seen. Not the slightest breeze stirred, but the air was cool and

refreshing. The fragrance of the various flowers in the garden near by flowed in at the open window and filled the room. Nature, clad in her most beautiful robes, was in her sweetest humor.

"Oh, what a lovely morning!" Mary exclaimed.

"Delightful," replied Tilly. "No fear that the picnic will be postponed on account of the weather."

"I think we may look for the party at the appointed time," said Mary, recollecting her dream.

"Certainly. The morning is so delightful, and the day promises to be so fair, that all will unhesitatingly hurry to the village—those who do not live immediately in Weston—and the party will soon be made up."

"It is two years since I was at a picnic on the mountain," remarked Mary; "I know I shall enjoy it to-day."

"I know of nothing to prevent you, unless it should rain or storm while we are there."

Mary started.

"What is the matter?" asked Tilly.

"Oh, I was just thinking of my dream."

"And what was your dream?"

"I thought we visited the White Rocks, but, strangely enough, it was in the night. While there a terrible storm burst forth, and frightened all the party away but myself."

"And it did n't frighten you?"

"Oh, yes; but I imagined I could not move till the winds came rushing down upon me; then I was blown over the precipice, and—"

"Dashed to pieces," suggested Tilly.

"Why, luckily, I awoke just in time to escape that fate."

"With a scream, too," replied Tilly. "Was that what made you cry out so?"

"Not exclusively. I dreamed that father was still alive; that he had forbidden me to go; that I had gone in spite of him, and that as I fell over the rocks I saw him in a dark

cloud, and heard him calling to me 'Oh, heedless girl! why did you come?' Was not that a strange dream?"

"Oh, dreams are nothing," replied Tilly. "I dreamed once that I was lost in Delany's Cave. I thought I wandered about for a long time in the darkness, and at last threw myself down in despair. When I did so, something rattled under me so curiously that I put my hand down to feel what it was, and oh, what do you think?"

"Not a rattlesnake, was it?"

"No, it was a skeleton!—the dry bones of some wretched creature who had perished there before me."

"What did you then do?"

"I screamed with terror, and awoke. I was trembling violently, and my heart was leaping about as though trying to escape from my body. How singular that a mere dream will have such an effect."

"Yes, I have often thought that such a dream is more frightful than the reality. But I prefer the dream, for it don't last so long."

"Besides," added Tilly, "the pleasure of awaking and finding it but a dream is a consideration."

"True," replied Mary. "If there is real pleasure in this world, it is to awake from a terrible dream, and find yourself safe and comfortable."

Aunt Eliza was already up and busy preparing breakfast. The girls joined her and lent their assistance. Ira was at the barn, looking after the horses. When breakfast was ready he was called, and that meal was dispatched, and every vestige of it removed—dishes washed and all—by six o'clock. Ira, telling the girls that he would return in due time and saddle the horses for them, started for the fields.

CHAPTER XVII.

PLEASURE AND PAIN.

A CLOUD of dust heralded the approach of the party from Weston. As it arose in the distance it was seen by Mary White and her cousin, and as the horses they were to ride stood saddled and bridled in the road, they walked down to the gate to be ready to join the gay equestrians. When they arrived, innumerable greetings were exchanged by the cousins and their friends, and in the meantime, gallantly attended by Philip Kirke and Ned Stanton respectively, Mary and Tilly ascended to their saddles and fell in the line, militarily speaking. Then all moved on, and were soon taking their way up the steep mountain.

However delightful equestrian exercise may be in the abstract, it was no joke to ride up an uneven path that ascended toward the clouds, as it were, at an angle of about thirty degrees. At times the horse, as it surmounted a particularly steep point, arose to a strictly vertical position, nicely poised on the hind feet; so that, taking into account the weight of the rider which clung to the back of the animal, it became a wonder, and one which would have borne scientific investigation, that the whole equipage, horse, saddle, bridle, and rider, did not tumble backward as often as forward. No accident of that nature happened, however, and in due time the party reached the White Rocks.

"Oh," exclaimed Mary White, abruptly, "I have been trying to think who was missing from the party. I know now."

"Who?" asked several.

"John Duffey. He is not here. Why is that?"

"He went to New Market yesterday," replied one, "and had not returned when we started. However, he was known to say, some days ago, that he would not come to the mountain to-day; no companion, therefore, was selected for him."

"That is strange," Mary replied. "This is the first affair of the kind I ever knew him to miss."

"It is rumored that he has fallen in love with a pretty New Market lady, and therefore do n't care about the Weston girls any more."

"I'd speak of *his* falling in love," observed a lass, who had once thought him enamoured of herself, but had in due time learned her mistake. "*He* fall in love! Dear me! Do n't believe it! He is proof against it!"

"I do n't know," gravely remarked another; "it is said there is a match for every one, and I believe it. I care not how handsome, how ugly, how cross, how good-natured, how smart, or how foolish a man may be, he is sure to encounter some female who, whether like him or not, seems to be just the partner for him, and the result is—a wedding."

"Well said," concurred Ned Stanton. "Nature would be wasting time by creating a man or woman without creating, about the same time, a fit companion. I believe the whole world is paired off, and if one do n't hunt up his appointed partner and marry her, it is his own fault." And he glanced at Tilly, who glanced some other way just then.

A little way from the White Rocks was a gently inclining plain of a few acres, covered with grass and small bushes. Here the horses were picketed, and the whole party proceeded to the cliff.

All were festive and happy. A mutual merry humor, much in keeping with the pleasant day and the beautiful scenes around them, prevailed. They spent an hour gazing upon the green rolling landscape that was spread out below, and inhaling the pure invigorating mountain air; then followed the repast, which consisted of bread-and-butter, pies, cakes, and sweetmeats, which the girls had brought in their

satchels. Then, with the understanding that they should reassemble at about three o'clock to prepare for their departure, all wandered forth among the rocks and shady trees in small groups or in twos. Ned Stanton escorted Miss Tilly Tate in a stroll, with a gallantry of bearing that did him great credit, considering that he, false fellow, was only playing a part. George Roland accompanied Miss Kitty Hempstead, while her Cousin Will was, as usual, agreeable to Miss Duffey. Philip Kirke, of course, was at Mary's side.

"No danger of snakes, I hope?" shuddered Miss Tilly, as she and her protector took their way among the rough rocks and thick trees.

"Not while *I* am with you, Tilly," replied Mr. Stanton, in a tone barely tinged with gallant reproach.

"Oh, I know you would n't let them hurt me," she apologized; "but—but—they might bite *you*." And she sighed at the thought.

"A snake won't bite *me*," said Stanton, consolingly; "especially a rattlesnake, which species of reptile chiefly abounds in these mountains. Besides, I have a mode of killing them, which, for effectiveness and dispatch, cannot be excelled or even equaled."

"Ah, how is that?"

"Why, I simply take them by the tail—"

"Oh, you frighten me!"

"—And, by giving it a flourish and a jerk, such as any one accustomed to handling a whip is familiar with, I suddenly dislocate the neck and detach the head of the monster, sending it spinning never less than thirty feet."

"Oh, you are only joking."

"Indeed I am not. If we only chance to find one here among the rocks—"

"Oh, I hope you would n't. I should faint."

"Certainly I would. You could stand behind a tree or a rock, so that it would not hit you. But we will not probably see any to-day, it is too early in the season. Wait till huckle-

berry-time; they are in their glory then. Great, fat, sleek fellows—"

"Oh, I shudder to think of them," interrupted Tilly. "Did you ever dream of snakes?"

"Several times in my life."

"It is said to signify that you have enemies."

"So I have been informed."

"And," continued Tilly, "if you kill the reptile that you will triumph over them."

"I believe it," returned Ned; "for once I dreamed of finding a great black-snake in my boot, where it had crawled while I was walking through the tall grass. I seized its tail, jerked it out, and snapped its head off in a twinkling; and on the very next day I was in Weston, and happened to meet a fellow there from Greene county, a rough character of the name of Job Welles, who for some reason bore a grudge against me, and he swore he would not go out of town until he should lick me. Now, every one knows that I am one of the most peaceably-disposed—"

"Yes, I know."

"—fellows in the county, and I did all in my power to pacify the ruffian, to assure him that I had nothing against him, and that it was not really necessary for him to lick me. He *would* have it though, and finding that there was no help for it, I threw off my coat and gave him the most terrible whipping he ever had in his life—all in about three-quarters of a minute."

"I presume he left then?"

"Yes, right away; and with my solemn promise as a man of honor, that should he ever show his face in Weston again I would give him five times as much, which would be equivalent to knocking the last breath out of him."

"And he has never been in Weston since?"

"Never."

"Then," said Tilly, "you should be regarded as a public benefactor, in ridding our settlement of the occasional pre-

sence of that rough man. I have heard of him frequently, and I know that he is an unscrupulous fellow."

Thus the conversation went on, as they wandered listlessly about the mountain. On one occasion Ned, with a significant sigh, abruptly observed:—

"Tilly, I have thought—I—" and he hesitated.

"What?" queried Tilly, almost eagerly.

"Oh, nothing," replied Ned, with another sigh; and he appeared sad and thoughtful during the remainder of the day.

Philip Kirke with Mary, and George Roland with Kitty, rambled away up the mountain in nearly the same direction. Philip and Mary stopped to examine some letters on an old beech-tree, while George and his companion passed on. In a few minutes Philip and Mary again walked on, stepping from rock to rock with the sprightliness inspired by the pleasant air and the wild scenery.

"Are you not growing tired?" Philip at length asked.

"A very little," Mary replied.

"Then let us rest, by all means," he urged. "There," pointing to the trunk of a fallen tree a little out of their way, "is a good seat for such a wild place as this, at least."

"Then let us avail ourselves of it."

They walked to the rough bench which Nature in her leisure hours had provided, and sat down.

"How beautiful the day is," said Philip.

"Charming," Mary replied. "We could not have had a pleasanter. I think dreams must have a contrary signification, if any, for I dreamed last night that it stormed terribly while we were at the White Rocks. But the weather could not be more mild nor the mountain more beautiful than to-day."

"True. I love the mountains on such a day as this," said Philip, rather sentimentally. "They seem to smile congenial with the blue sky, as if together they were determined to make man happy. All that detracts from my enjoyment

now is the thought of so soon leaving these bright scenes, and—of—of—leaving you."

"That should not trouble you. You will certainly visit the mountains again. You may spend many a happy day yet among these old gray rocks. However, if we look into the future, we are sure to see more of pain and perplexity than of pleasure. I think we should learn to enjoy the present."

They chatted pleasantly together for a quarter of an hour on various topics. No one passed near them or interrupted their tete-a-tete, though they occasionally heard voices not far off, and now and then a ringing laugh. At length there was a pause in the conversation, lasting about a minute. Philip rather abruptly broke the silence.

"Mary," said he, gravely.

She almost started at the sound of his voice. In a single instant it told her all he was about to say.

"Mary," he proceeded, "but for this golden opportunity, and the enthusiasm and courage with which the surrounding beauties inspire me, I might ever have hesitated to tell you what I am resolved to tell you now."

"What can that be?" asked Mary, with but poorly-affected indifference.

"I compare so unfavorably with you," said Philip, gazing admiringly on Mary's averted face, "that I still dread you will consider me presumptuous for so addressing you. But I must; I cannot help it now! I have even tried to—in fact, I thought I would remain silent, but I cannot! Oh, Mary! Dear Mary!"—seizing her hand—"I love you!"—the hand was not withdrawn—"I have loved you since I first met you at—at—your father's!"—a kiss imprinted on the trembling hand. "Oh, think not unkindly of me! Forgive me for daring to hope, and tell me if I may continue to hope that my feelings may not be entirely disregarded! Oh, could I, dare I hope that you would one day consent to be mine?"

Mary did not reply in words, but her head, already bowed, reclined gently upon the shoulder of her father's murderer.

"Oh, I have not offended you!" exclaimed Philip.

"No," replied Mary, without raising her head. "I never thought—of--of—but you have always been so kind to me, and now that my father is gone—" And she burst into tears.

It was enough. The deluded girl's reply to her suitor, though brief, broken, and unfinished, was earnest and full of eloquence. Philip drew the pretty face closer to his, and imprinted a kiss upon the cheek which was wet with tears his crime had caused to flow. Ah, poisonous, treacherous kiss! Ah, Mary! why did it not sting your cheek—that kiss from the murderer of your father! But you knew it not. You knew not the living embodiment of crime to whom your affections were plighted! You saw only before you your lover!

Now, if there was one person, more than another, who should not have witnessed this love scene, it was the one that *did* witness it—George Roland. He and that little minx, Kitty Hempstead, had gone about two hundred yards beyond and had halted to rest for a moment, when she exclaimed "Oh, dear! I am so thirsty! Won't you run back to the spring at the White Rocks and get me a drink of water? Do! that's a dear good fellow! You will find a tin-cup in my satchel." And so there was nothing for George but to comply, while Kitty took a seat to await his return. It was an easy matter to go to the White Rocks, but it was a task that required the utmost care to walk several hundred yards up the steep mountain, over rough rocks and among intricate patches of bushes, carrying a cup of water. To have done so without spilling any, would have been a prodigy. George was returning with the water, carefully and quietly picking his way over the rocks, when, hearing voices a little to his right, he looked in the direction and saw the scene just described—saw, with an aching heart, his hated rival pas-

sionately kissing the only woman he loved, and she leaning confidingly upon his shoulder. Oh, the agony, the pain of heart, the cruel torture, the tearing and blighting of his most sacred affections, comprised in that one instant!

"Ah," muttered George, moving carefully away, "I would not for the world have him know how he has pierced my heart. How he would exult! Not in words, but how every look from his evil eye would silently taunt me! Oh, curse him! I do not believe he loves Mary! He has sought and won her affections for the sole purpose of inflicting pain on me. And oh, such pain! He knows I love her, and how I must suffer were I to see them united. But he shall see no cause to exult over me. No, though I should be present at the marriage ceremony, and see the life contract sealed with a kiss, I will smile while my bleeding heart aches beyond expression, and I will look so indifferent, nay, pleased, that he will not think it possible that I ever loved her, or that her choice gives me the least dissatisfaction, much less pain!"

George was still pale, and there was a strange light in his eye when he returned to where Kitty awaited him, having spilt three-fourths of the water with which he had started from the spring.

"Why, what is the matter, George? You look pale!" exclaimed Kitty.

"Oh, nothing," he replied, seating himself.

"But *something* has happened; what is it?"

"Nothing; only I—I'm not well."

"And I sent you to the spring for water," said Kitty, in a tone of self-reproach; "and you sick."

"No, Kitty, I'm not sick," he replied; "but—but—I saw a snake."

"Surely that would not frighten you thus."

"But I was so nearly upon it before I saw it," said George; "it appeared so unexpectedly."

"Did you kill it?"

"No."

"Why did n't you?"

"Because it seemed so comfortable and happy that I had n't the heart to. It was quietly feeding on a dove."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Kitty, perceiving that the color was returning to his face. "I do n't believe you saw any snake at all. You are just teasing me. But *are* you sick?"

"No, I am not. Think no more of it. Why do you not drink the water I brought? It will get warm if you keep it much longer. There is no great quantity of it; I spilled it nearly all coming up."

"There is enough, more than I want. Will *you* drink some of it?"

"No, you drink it."

Kitty drank about half the water, then handed the cup to George, saying:—

"There, I do not want any more; drink the remainder or I will throw it out."

"A pity it should be wasted," said George, with assumed indifference. And he took the cup and eagerly drained it.

From that time he resolved to drive from his mind, if possible, the scene which he had witnessed, and in the genial society of his sprightly little companion he soon recovered his habitual good spirits.

It was nearly four o'clock when all had returned from their rambling and assembled upon the White Rocks. The sky was still as clear, and the mountain atmosphere as pleasant, as in the morning. Before departing, one of the party, addressing the others collectively, spoke to the following effect:—

"Neighbors, we have spent the day most pleasantly in this beautiful region. I am sure there is not one of us who does not feel better and happier in consequence of the day's recreation. Now, I propose that we make up our minds to visit the mountain again when the huckleberries are ripe, which will be in six or eight weeks at the furthest. I would sug-

gest that we then visit the vicinity of Delany's Cave, where the bushes grow in abundance. What say you all?"

"I agree," responded several.

"And I," "And I," went round.

"Then," continued the speaker, "shall it be understood that we visit the mountain when the berries are ripe?"

"Yes," "Yes," "Yes," was answered from all sides.

"Unanimous! We can arrange the day when the season approaches. Till then, with three cheers for the White Rocks, let us adjourn."

The cheers were given in a merry humor, and the party proceeded to their horses and rode down the mountain. When they reached Ira Tate's, Mary and Tilly, in the midst of numerous injunctions not to forget the berry-excursion, bade the others good-by. Lastly, Philip Kirke and Ned Stanton took leave of the cousins, and, with the party, rode briskly toward Weston.

CHAPTER XVIII.

NED AS A FARMER.

ONE evening toward the close of June, half-a-dozen farmers were assembled in Mr. Duffey's store. George Roland and Will Hempstead were among them. John Duffey was also present.

"Do you know," observed a young farmer of the name of Wilson, "that Ned Stanton is getting to be a much more steady fellow than he used to be?"

"He don't drink so much as of old," said another, whose name was Franks.

"He has put in a large field of corn on his father's place—the thirty-acre field by the road—and I believe he has undertaken to cultivate it himself."

"That is why he don't come to town so frequently now," said John. "When he finishes his day's labors I suppose he feels like resting. Oh, I know it sets hard with him to settle down to hard labor."

"What can be the cause of his sudden change of demeanor?" wondered George Roland.

"I cannot imagine," responded John, "unless, indeed, it was the scare he got in the graveyard last fall. There *was* something strange in that affair."

"Pshaw!" returned George. "I have heard about that, and I believe it was all a well-played trick."

"Trick! A good one, then, for it frightened some more of us besides Ned, and would probably have frightened us as much had we been where he was. Ask Tony Baily, or Dick Miller, or Will Hempstead there. We were all in the road at the time, watching Ned; and even there, when we saw a white figure suddenly arise out of the very earth, and as suddenly disappear, it made the hair of our heads stand on end. I really expected to find mine gray next morning."

"I do not accuse you," replied George, "of playing the trick, or even of instigating it, although I swear it was just like one of your's. There is sufficient evidence to clear you of the crime, or at least to establish the fact that you were not in the graveyard wrapped in a sheet, or anything of that sort."

"Yes," said John, "Tony, Will, or Dick (if *he* can be induced to speak) will testify that I was in the road with them. thus establishing an *alibi*, as the lawyers call it. But I wonder if we really may attribute Ned's improvement to that night's influences?"

"I've seen him drunk since that," suggested Will.

"Oh, so have I, several times," replied John; "but not so frequently, by half, as of yore."

"*I* think," observed a grave young man, who sat on an inverted nail-keg, "that Ned is going to get married; and that may have something to do with his change."

"To whom?" asked one.

"Tilly Tate. He has been mighty attentive to her for some time, and I'll bet my hat 'twill make a match."

"Would he have her, think you?" queried Wilson, merely for information.

"Would *she* have *him?*" proposed Franks, by way of imparting another feature to the case.

"I think they 're well matched," returned he of the empty nail-keg. "On what grounds would he object to her?"

"On the grounds of her being a little too old for him, I suppose," hazarded Wilson.

"And I think she would consider him too rowdy for her, probably," ventured Franks.

"So, they will no doubt call it square, and wed," argued the nail-keg gentleman.

"How does he prosper under his new habits?" asked George Roland.

"Well enough," replied Duffey, "only that he retains *one* bad habit, which he never *will* get rid of."

"What is that?" asked several.

"Talkativeness!" replied John. "Dear me, let any one but pass along the road near the field in which Ned is at work, and he'll be hailed, and stopped, and talked at, till he is ready to faint. Only yesterday I rode by, and although I was in a hurry, he stopped me, dropped his plough, came and perched himself on the fence, and commenced! Then, how he talked! How his tongue worked for a while! He told me hundreds of things of which I had never heard before; and it was fully an hour and a half before there was the slightest breach in the thread of his conversation. At last, watching for an opportunity to escape, I perceived that he was about to break off for a second to inhale a good long breath; and the instant he paused, while his chest was past expanding with an im-

mense supply of air to be discharged at me in the shape of words, I took, I confess, a cowardly advantage of him, and almost yelled out, 'Yes, exactly—I'll see you again—good-day!' and off I went like a bullet."

"From an air-gun," suggested nail-keg.

"Is he going through his field the first time?" asked George.

"No, he told me he had been over it once before. How he ever got entirely over that big field, is a mystery to me. There could not have been many passers by while he was at work, or it would have taken him all summer."

"And is he now going through the second time?"

"Yes, he has only commenced within a day or two to work it with a shovel-plough. I think, for his own good, we ought to give him a lesson."

"How should we?" asked Wilson.

"I have a plan," returned John. "I propose that five or six of us take a holiday to-morrow, and pass along the road at regular intervals, each stopping a couple of hours with Ned, thus occupying the whole day nicely. When night comes, and he finds that he has spent the day in gossiping, and got no work done, it may cause him to reflect seriously."

"And the end of his reflections," suggested the grave young man on the nail-keg, "may be that he will lick every one of us in detail, for tricking him."

"Oh, he will not suspect us," said John. "Let each one go on horse-back, and say that we are going to Morgantown, or some other place up the river."

Morgantown, then a small village, is now a flourishing town of several thousand inhabitants. It is situated on the Monongahela river, in Western Virginia, only a few miles from the Pennsylvania line.

"It would at least be a good joke," said Will Hempstead; "and I, for one, am in for it."

"I will act my part," said George Roland.

Several others consented, a dark plan was concocted, and,

with the understanding that all should assemble at Tony's on the following evening and compare notes, the party adjourned.

A little after seven o'clock next morning, Ned Stanton started for his cornfield, under the most auspicious circumstances. The birds were singing cheerfully in the woods near by, the young blades of corn were moist with dew, the morning was bright and clear, and the day promised to be one of the most glorious of the summer, though, perhaps, a little warmer than necessary.

"Ned," said Mr. Stanton, who was about to depart for a field on another part of the farm, "you should try to do a good day's work on your corn to-day, if you expect it to come to anything. I think you spent half your time yesterday, talking with passers-by. A foolish habit, Ned."

"I couldn't help it, father," replied Ned, who regarded his sire with the greatest veneration; "the men who passed yesterday were such talkative fellows that I couldn't get away from them, especially young Duffey."

"But don't let them stop you. When they come along, just say 'good-day,' and drive into a new row, and I am sure the traveler will not stand in the road, and wait till you return from the other side of the field. I fear much of it is your own fault, Ned," said Mr. Stanton, good-humoredly.

"Come now, father," retorted the son, "you know I am one of the quietest fellows in ———."

"Yes, I know all about that," interrupted the father, laughing; "I truly believe you would not speak a hundred words in a year, if you had no one to talk to."

"I think I would die then," muttered Ned, as he started for the cornfield.

Mr. Stanton, who was still a strong and vigorous man, departed for the scene of *his* labors.

"About one-fourth done," soliloquized Ned, as he reached the spot at which he had left off the previous day. "Now if I work at all industriously, I will finish in five or six days.

Well, I'm going at it, and confound if I don't do some tall work. I'll plough a hundred and fifty rows to-day. or my horse gives out. No danger of that though. Woa, whaw, get up!" And Ned commenced his day's labors, with the very best intention.

Following the straight rows of corn which ran at right angles with the road, he had traversed the width of the field four times, and was just departing from the public road on another trip, when who should ride along but John Duffey.

"Hilloa, Duffey! how do you do?" exclaimed Ned, dropping the handle of his plough, and going to the fence. "Fine morning! What's the news? Where are you traveling to, so early?"

"I am going to Morgantown," John calmly replied.

"Coming back to-day?"

"I scarcely know. If I make good time, I will; if not, I will return to-morrow."

"Nothing new in town, is there? I hav n't been there since night before last."

"Nothing particular," was the reply.

"Not much talk of a war with England?"

"No, that talk seems to have died away; though I am inclined to think it will be revived again."

"Do you think so? Well, by ginger," exclaimed Ned, patriotically, "we licked England twenty-five or thirty years ago, and we can do it again! My daddy helped to do it then, and *I'll* help now! Let the British come as soon as they please! I'll go and enlist, if it's to-morrow! Don't care if I hear of it now," said Ned, warming up, "I'd drop my plough, I'd leave my horse stand in the furrow, as the farmers did when they heard of the battle of Lexington; I would n't take time to take the gears off! I'd take up my rifle and be off! I'd go to Weston, and from there to Pittsburg with the first crowd of one, two, three, a dozen, or a hundred, that would go; and I would join the first regiment organized. Death to the red-coats! I can lick a dozen of 'em myself, ary way they

want to fight. John Bull be darned! This Nation licked him when an infant: now we're a man! Let him come with his regiments of musketeers, and his showy cavalcades! Let him come with his fleets! We'll give him—oh, I say, Duffey, I'm sure I'd like a soldier's life, wouldn't you? My venerable parent served in the Revolution, and he could tell some great things about it if he would. But, dear me, it is hard to get him started! He don't seem to take any pride or pleasure in relating his experience. He don't take after me in that respect. I think if I were once a soldier, I'd give my children, grand-children, great-grand-children, and friends, and acquaintances, generally, a most glowing account of what I had seen and what I had done, and of the million hair-breadth escapes—your father served in the war, too, didn't he? Does he ever tell you anything about it? or is he like the old man in that respect? Strange—"

"Never says much about it."

"— about these old soldiers—how little they care about telling of the deeds of fame they have seen and done. As I said before, to tell the truth about the matter—" and thus Ned went on for nearly two hours, when John, feeling that time was about up, adroitly gave him the slip.

"Gee, woa, get up!" said Ned, seizing the neglected plough-handles, and the single line with which he guided the horse. "A good fellow, that Duffey," he muttered, as the clumsy plough went digging, and dragging, and jerking along, tearing up the loose soil and throwing it about the young stalks of corn.

In due time he had crossed and re-crossed the large field; and just as he reached the road once more, George Roland rode leisurely along.

"Hilloa, Roland! How are you?" exclaimed Ned, again suspending his work.

"Why, good morning, Ned," responded George, drawing up his horse opposite; "I came near not seeing you!"

"Traveling to-day?" asked Ned.

"Yes, I am on my way to Morgantown."

"To Morgantown! John Duffey went there to-day!"

"Yes, I learned last night that he intended to go, and I went to Weston, thinking to join him in his journey, but was too late. If I had known he had already gone, I should have taken the other road, which would have been nearer for me than going by the village."

"Do you expect to come back to-day?" Ned asked.

"I scarcely think I will. However, I shall meet Duffey there, and if he returns to-day I will.

"Morgantown is a rough place," began Ned, settling himself into a comfortable position against the fence; "so, mind yourself while there. I got into a most confounded scrape there once, and only escaped with my life by fighting my way out. You see, some of their rowdy fellows there, knowing that I was alone, thought it would be very nice to raise a quarrel with me and give me a sound thrashing; and so, while I was sitting quietly in the tavern, waiting for dinner, not saying a word to any body, and looking as pleasant as I could, in comes a big fellow of the crowd, first of all—" and Ned proceeded to relate his thrilling Morgantown adventure, in all its details; occupying fully an hour.

When he had concluded, George might have made his escape, as Ned seemed at a momentary loss for a new subject; but feeling that he had not quite fulfilled his share of the plot, he assisted his loquacious friend to a new topic, by remarking:

"There is some talk that you are going to get married, Ned."

"Who told you that?" asked Ned.

"Everybody thinks so," replied George.

"Who do they say is to be Mrs. Stanton?"

"Oh, *you* know."

"No I don't, who is it?"

"Why, Miss Tilly Tate. Come, now, there's no use denying it."

"Well, now, I—I—" stuttered Ned, with well-assumed confusion, "nobody's sure of that."

"You know you have been very attentive to her of late," suggested George. "At the White Rocks, for instance—"

"Had a nice time that day," interrupted Ned, now fairly started again, "glorious! Everything passed off smoothly—delightfully! By the way, Kitty Hempstead is a pretty girl, I think, and I rather think you think so, too, of late. Talk about weddings. You'll be married first yet, mind if you don't. Kitty is a nice girl, and just as pretty as Molly White, whom, they say, Phil Kirke cut you out of—"

George affected to laugh.

"—but I don't believe you ever tried to cut in there. Pretty girl, though, is Molly. Had a heap of trouble lately—lost her father in such a mysterious way. There was something strange about the murder of Henry White—if he *was* murdered, which no doubt he was. It is my opinion, in regard to that circumstance, and always was, that, taking everything into consideration—" and Ned proceeded to give George the full benefit of *his* opinion, and had just concluded, when the sound of the horn at the farm-house summoned him to dinner.

"Well, I must ride on," said George.

"Won't you come in to dinner?" Ned asked.

"No, thank you; I want to reach Morgantown before Duffey starts back. I fear I have kept you from your work."

"Oh, not at all. I have not done a great deal this forenoon, it is true, but I'll make up for it after dinner."

"Good-day."

"Good-by, and a safe journey."

Ned detached his horse from the plough, and led it toward the farm-house, while George rode on half-a-mile when he came to a by-road that led across to the other parallel public road, and, as John Duffey had done more than two hours

earlier, he turned into it with a view to reaching home as soon as possible.

After dinner Ned returned to the field.

"I declare, I didn't get much done this forenoon," he soliloquized, as he resumed his work. "Very well, I'll make up for it this afternoon; and if the old man should walk out in this direction after supper, he won't know but I have been working most faithfully the whole day. Glad he didn't question me at dinner. Woa—gee, g'lang! you old rascal!" exclaimed Ned, addressing the horse. "Do you want to tramp all the corn down? Why don't you keep straight ahead, and not waddle about in that way?"

The animal did not reply to these queries, but meekly "woa-geed" and "g'langed" as directed.

Ned had made half-a-dozen of his agricultural excursions since dinner, and the great beads of sweat which began to traverse his face attested the earnestness with which he had commenced his afternoon's labors, when he descried Will Hempstead approaching on horseback, and thought it would be no more than polite to wait till he should come up, and at least bid him the time of day.

"How do you do, Will?" was Ned's greeting, as his neighbor rode up. "You're on the wrong road, ain't you?"

"Why, no," replied Will; "the fact is, I am going to Morgantown, and having a little business in the village—"

"Where?" asked Ned. "Where did you say you were going?"

"To Morgantown," returned Will, innocently.

"To Morgantown?"

"Yes, and I came through Weston because I had a little business to transact there first."

Ned was silent for a moment—a thing unusual with him when he had any one to talk to; then, in a sober, thoughtful voice, asked:—

"Is there anything particular going on at Morgantown to-day?"

"Not that I am aware of," was the reply. "Why do you ask?"

"Nothing; only John Duffey and George Roland both went by this forenoon, on their way to Morgantown."

"Is it possible? Now, had I known they were going, I might have had company. *They* went together, of course?"

"No, John went an hour or two earlier."

To attempt to describe the conversation that followed would be futile. Suffice it to say, that Will found no difficulty in passing a couple of hours with his talkative neighbor. After which he rode on, and, like his predecessors, took early measures to return home.

"Blazes! have n't I been fooling the time away!" muttered Ned, after he had gone." It must be after two o'clock, and not a dozen rows ploughed the whole day. Well, I must go and get a drink of water, and go to work in earnest. Awful hot to-day—makes a fellow thirsty." And leaving his horse and plough stand, he proceeded to the spring and slaked his thirst.

He had barely returned to his plough, when young Wilson came riding along.

"How are you? Which way are you traveling?" asked Ned, as Wilson stopped.

"I'm going to Morgantown," was Wilson's calm reply.

"Where?" asked Ned, amazed.

"To Morgantown," was the cool reply.

Ned stared in astonishment.

"What's the matter?" asked Wilson.

"Did I understand you to say you were going to *Morgantown?*" asked Ned, in a distinct tone.

"Yes. Why?"

"You say you are actually going to Morgantown?" repeated Ned, with awful deliberation.

"Yes, what of that? I know it is rather late in the day to be starting, but I will not return till to-morrow."

"Why—why—a—ah—" stuttered Ned, with scarce imagi-

nation to give shape, or words to give utterance, to his astonishment, "why—I—this—is—this is very—beats the deuse!"

"What beats the deuse?"

"*You are the fourth man from near Weston who has passed here to-day, going to Morgantown!*"

"Is it possible? Who in the name—"

"John Duffey, George Roland, and Will Hempstead."

Wilson was astonished. "What in the world—"

"Are you sure nothing is going on there to-day?" asked Ned; "a big meeting, a raising, a shooting-match, a dog-fight, a—"

"Nothing at all, that I know of."

It was after four o'clock when Wilson rode on, and ten minutes later his place, as Ned's audience, was promptly occupied by Franks, who, to Ned's unutterable amazement, complacently represented himself as *en route* for Morgantown! In answer to Ned's broken ejaculations and half-expressed queries, he stated that he knew it was late; that he would not, of course, return till next day; that he did not know of anything going on at Morgantown; was simply going on business; was not aware that four others had gone before him with the same destination in view. He admitted that it was very remarkable, etc.

When, after a long conversation, *he* at length took his leave, it was supper-time, and poor Ned in despair gave up work for the day, resolved to go to the village that evening and drown the memory of his disgraceful negligence in the enticing bowl.

That evening, the five young men who had made it their business to teach Ned Stanton a useful lesson, assembled, according to agreement, in Tony Baily's bar-room, and each gave a brief sketch of his day's proceedings. They enjoyed several hearty laughs in the course of the different recitals, especially at the idea of what Ned must certainly regard as the most remarkable series of coincidences that ever came so directly under his own observation—that of all happening to

visit Morgantown on the one day, each without the knowledge of any other.

"Now," said George Roland, "I propose that we devote another day to Ned, but in a different way."

"What do you propose?" asked Duffey.

"That we each, to-morrow if it is convenient, take a horse and plough, and give Ned a lift in his work. Such a proceeding, following upon that of the past day, will not only tend to impress more deeply upon his mind the lesson we have humbly endeavored to teach him, but will also serve to remove any ill-will he may bear us, should he find us out. What say you all?"

All agreed to join George in carrying out this really noble scheme, and it was just arranged that all should meet in Weston early on the following morning, with a view to proceeding *en masse* to Stanton's farm, when Ned entered.

To picture the consternation of the plotters would be the work of the liveliest imagination and the most fertile brain. Ned stood in the doorway for a moment, looking the personification of perplexity and astonishment, evidently wondering by what unknown route or unaccountable locomotion the young men had so soon returned from Morgantown, while they, on their part, almost shrank within themselves with chagrin. At length Ned found words to exclaim:—

"Is it possible that I have made a mistake and gone to Morgantown, instead of to Weston? or am I mad or drunk? or, in fact, have I ever been sober?"

A loud laugh followed.

"Or," shuddered Ned, as a new and terrible idea thrust itself upon him, "am I dead and in that terrible place where the preacher once told me the demons would laugh at my unfortunate selection of a dwelling-place?"

Another laugh greeted his bewildered senses, such a loud and seemingly unearthly laugh that his worst fears were almost confirmed. A happy argument, however, came to his relief.

"No I'm not!" he exclaimed joyfully. "It can't be Did n't the same preacher say that there were no pleasure there? and lo, the first thing I see is my old favorite! Hurrah! Hand him down, Tony," he concluded, pointing to a large black bottle, containing the best old rye.

Tony seized the solemn-looking old bottle, and set it on the counter.

"Come and take a drink, boys, all of you," said Ned. "I see it all now. Good trick, was n't it. I was fairly taken down, I acknowledge."

"Ned, forgive us," said Duffey. "It was I who proposed to play this trick on you, but it was more to render you a service than for the fun of it. We hoped that it would enable you to see the folly of spending so much time talking with passers-by."

"No harm," responded Ned, so good-humoredly that all regretted the day's proceedings. "It served me right. Come, take a drink."

All drank to Ned's better luck, and after spending half an hour in the bar-room more quietly than he had ever before done, he took his leave.

"Will you work at your corn to-morrow, Ned?" asked Duffey, as he stepped from the door.

"Yes, and I'll do a day's work," was Ned's reply. "You'll not trick me to-morrow."

"Yes we will," said Duffey; "see if we do n't."

"I'll be on the watch for you hereafter."

Next morning, as Ned was about to depart for his cornfield, with renewed resolutions to be diligent, he was somewhat astonished at seeing five young men, each with horse and shovel-plough, enter the farm-yard gate.

"Only come to play that other trick, Ned; it is one of Roland's concocting," explained Duffey.

And they *did* play it well. All worked steadily in Ned's cornfield that day, and when evening came the whole task was done—the field completely canvassed.

"Well, boys," observed Ned, when the last row was ploughed, "this is the best trick yet, and I'll never forget you for it. I *did* feel a little like walking into you last night at Tony's, as I first realized how you had fooled me, but I am glad I did n't now. For what you have done, both yesterday and to-day, I thank you. The lesson you have taught me shall not be lost. Hereafter I will drink and talk less, and work more. I do not say I will stop drinking and talking—that would be impossible; but what I do in that way shall be in season. There's a time for everything."

The young men returned to their homes that evening, feeling that satisfaction and happiness which only those *can* feel who have acted a noble and disinterested part.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE RATTLESNAKE.

On a sultry day in August a number of young folks from the Weston settlement were gathered upon the mountain not far from Delany's Cave, where the whortleberries grew in all the luxuriance of their wild nature. The sun had almost reached the zenith, and his rays came down so hot as almost to scorch the earth. On the mountain it was more pleasant than in the settlement, but even there scarce a breath of air was stirring, and the leaves hung languidly upon the trees, as though about to wither and fade before their time.

Each one of the party had a small basket or other vessel, to be filled with berries ere they should resort to the cave. A plot of several acres, on which the mountain fruit grew

thickest, was selected as the field of operations, and all entered earnestly upon the work of picking berries.

Suddenly a loud shrill scream startled the scattering party, and all turning quickly in the direction of the sound, saw Miss Matilda Tate drop her basket, spring back, and scram ble away toward the nearest high rock with rather more of swiftness and frantic energy than feminine grace. To add to the general interest of the picture, her bonnet fell off, her hair came down and streamed wildly after her, and her face was pale with mortal fear. She soon reached a flat rock, which arose a few feet above the tops of the bushes, and springing upon it with the quickness of a squirrel, she threw herself into a reclining position, and made a desperate attempt to faint—but could n't.

"What's the matter? What is it? What has happened?" exclaimed a score of her companions, gathering around her.

"A—a—a sn—n—n—ake!" replied Tilly, too poorly supplied with breath to say it all at once.

"Where?" was asked.

"Among—the—bushes—up there. I came near—near stepping on it. O! O!" shuddered Tilly.

Leaving the terrified Tilly in the care of her female companions, nearly all the young men cautiously approached the spot from which she had so precipitately retreated. When they reached the basket which she had dropped (by which operation she had spilt just three pints of berries) they knew that the reptile, if she had really seen one, could not be far off; and they proceeded with renewed deliberation and care, peering among the bushes, here and there thrusting them aside with sticks, and, in fact, inspecting every square inch of ground before daring to tread upon it.

"Whoever finds it," said Ned Stanton, "let him not kill it; leave it to me. *I'll* show you how to dispose of one of these creatures in a civilized and scientific manner."

"How is that?" asked George Roland.

"Why, simply—"

"There it is!" suddenly exclaimed Philip Kirke, springing back upon the toes of a timid young man who was following in his tracks.

"Where? Show it to me?" said Ned, at his side in a moment.

"There," replied Philip, pointing to a large rattlesnake that lay coiled up among the bushes, so perfectly at his ease that he must have imagined himself the owner of at least half the mountains.

"An old residenter!" exclaimed Ned, in admiration. "Now I'll venture that fellow has half a pint of rattles on his tail—so many he can't count 'em, and don't know his own age! I'm confident he is the great-grandfather of one I killed near this spot about four years ago. I see an unmistakable family resemblance."

"He don't seem much alarmed," observed Philip.

"Oh, no! He comes of a noble race of serpents, and don't know what fear is. You can never make me believe that any of *his* antecedents had anything to do with that treacherous apple transaction. I do not doubt that it was a snake, but it was no rattlesnake; it must have been a *black*-snake—or—or," said Ned, as a bright idea struck him, "a contemptible *water*-snake."

"How do you propose to kill him?" queried Philip.

"I'll show you," replied Ned, with the confident self-reliance of a skillful magician.

He then drew forth a large pocket-knife, which he always carried, and cut from an adjacent bush a forked stick three feet long, the prongs of which he cut to the length of about one inch, all the time keeping his eyes on the intended victim. With that instrument in his hand he fearlessly approached his snakeship, until he stood within his immediate presence, and a savage "hiss" warned him not to come nearer.

"Be careful, Ned," cautioned George Roland; "you are near enough for him to strike you now."

"No fear of that," replied Ned. "He knows better. No one ever struck me yet without getting the worst of it."

"Come, Ned," urged another, "no fooling about it. Stand back and let us kill it with clubs."

"Never mind," persisted Ned; "this is n't the first I've executed in my way. Now just be quiet, and you'll see a bit of fun. I say, old snakey," he went on, addressing himself to the serpent, at the same time slowly thrusting the fork of the stick near its head, "you have violated the laws of this community by coming out of your den when there are white folks present, and even frightening one of our fair young ladies; now, the penalty for every such offence is death—death at the hands of the headsman, and the headsman is myself. Have you anything to say?"

"Hiss! Hiss! Hiss-s-s-s-s-s!" came from the quivering tail of the monster, as he slowly uncoiled his long form, and began to rear his horrid head for a spring.

"No you do n't!" exclaimed Ned; and, quick as thought, he thrust the fork over the reptile's neck, crushed it down, and held the head firmly to the earth.

In vain Mr. Snake endeavored to extricate himself from this embarrassing situation. He writhed, and twisted, and curled, and slapped about, making the rattles on his tail fairly buz, but all to no purpose.

"Why do n't you stamp his head at once and finish him?" asked several.

"That's not my mode," replied Ned, deliberately grasping the serpent's tail with his right hand, while he still firmly held the stick with his left. "Now stand back, every one of you, so that the head wont hit you, for I am going to snap it off and send it flying, I tell you."

"Why Ned, you fool," remonstrated George Roland, "is that what you are going to do? Do n't try it, for your life, with that big snake;" and he was about to rush up and crush the reptile's head beneath his boot-heel, to prevent the reckless fellow from uselessly hazarding his life.

But at that moment Ned cried out:

"Stand back! Here goes! One! *two!* THREE!"

All shrank back in horror as the heedless fellow suddenly released the serpent's neck, still retaining his grasp upon the tail, and began to whirl it round and round above his head. This he continued for a few seconds, then gave it a flourish and counter-flourish, by way of bringing affairs to a crisis. But the serpent did not prove to be quite so flexible as a whiplash; and making a desperate effort to strike once more ere it should lose its head, it succeeded, as much by chance as otherwise, in fastening its fangs in the back of Ned's hand. With a quick cry of pain he relinquished his grasp upon its tail, knocked it from his hand, staggered away a few steps, and fell almost insensible to the ground. His companions, seeing what was done, rushed hastily up, with a mutual exclamation of horror, stamped the serpent to death, and gathered round their unfortunate comrade.

"Mercy! what on earth is to be done?" exclaimed several, perceiving that Ned was pale as death, and that his hand was beginning to swell and turn black.

"Oh, what *can* we do?" echoed several others, in the agonizing consciousness of being able to do nothing.

"Run for the doctor!" screamed one.

"Impossible! He lives at least six miles distant!"

"Let us put him on a horse, and move him down the mountain, while some one on a swift horse rides forward and instructs the doctor to meet us," said George Roland, and several ran away for the purpose of bringing some of the horses.

At this interesting moment the girls, comprehending what had happened, rushed to the spot, and fell to screaming and crying and fainting; and the scene became one of the liveliest confusion, intermingled with consternation and horror. As is usual in such cases, all gathered closely around, in order to prevent any fresh air from finding its way to the sufferer, and thus to lessen the chances of his recovery.

Suddenly a wild-looking, withered, old woman, clothed in faded rags, appeared upon the scene, and rushed into the midst of the confused crowd, shouting:

"Stand aside, ye fools. What would become o' that man if I was n't hur. Ha! ha! Molly's never far off when she's wanted—for all she's a wicked old creature!" and thrusting aside all who stood in her way, she quickly arrived at the spot where Ned lay, threw herself upon the ground beside him, seized his poisoned hand, pressed the lacerated part to her mouth for a few seconds, then spat out a mouthful of blackened blood.

"She's sucking the poison out," exclaimed one.

"Yes, and none of us thought of that," replied another. "That will save him."

The old woman, who was no other than Molly Pry, the fortune-teller of the mountain, again applied her lips to the wounded hand, and again spat out the poison which she drew from it. This she repeated many times, and Ned soon revived. Still she continued her strange treatment of the wound, until it was evident that the poison was all drawn out.

"The p'ison can't hurt *me*," said Molly. "There aint a tooth in me head, nor has been for ten years. Where they once growed is all healed over an' covered with the gums, so there is no place for p'ison to git to my blood, if I only spit it out, an' Molly's got sense enough for that."

Ned presently arose to a sitting posture, and looked coolly around him. The color was returning to his face, his hand was not so black or swollen as a few minutes before, and it was now pretty clear that the poison had not had time to circulate to any extent before it was extracted by the crazy old fortune-teller, and that his wound could not prove serious. He was obviously about to speak, and all listened eagerly to what he might have to say. It was the prevailing opinion that he would ask whether there was any hope, or that he would beg for a little water, or ask where he was

and what had happened; and some even expected him to express his views as to what disposition should be made of his property after death, or to make known whether he had any preference as to the time and place of his burial. For a moment his eyes wandered about as though looking for something among the bushes, then he calmly asked:

"Where's the snake?"

"What?" asked nearly all the party at once, unable to persuade themselves that they had heard aright.

"Where is that rattlesnake?" Ned repeated, distinctly.

"There it lies, dead as a door-nail," one had the presence of mind to reply.

"What! you hav n't killed it?" demanded Ned, indignantly.

"Yes, certainly. Why should n't we?" replied one, and all now began to lean to the opinion that Ned was in a delirium.

"Why," exclaimed Ned, "I did n't quite finish my operation. You did n't see the best part of it. However, it'll do yet." And he deliberately arose to his feet, though trembling slightly from temporary weakness, took the lifeless reptile by the tail, whirled it around a moment, then giving it that adverse flourish by which a whip is made to crack, sent its head flying away twenty or thirty feet among the bushes.

"Why, I declare!" exclaimed several, "he do n't mind it a bit!"

"No," responded Ned; "if any difference I feel the better of it."

All stood for a moment staring at Ned, and regarding him as a living wonder, while one exclaimed:

"Why, what kind of a fellow are you?'

"A snake-doctor," retorted Ned. "I've dissected more of 'em than I have fingers and toes. I know every bone in their body. I can tell their age by their teeth; where they live by the color of their eyes, and how many of 'em there

are in the family by the length of their tongues. But say, my good old woman," Ned went on, addressing Molly, "you've done a good turn for me, now what can I do to reward you?"

"Nothing," replied the fortune-teller; "only let snakes alone after this. Don't fool with 'em that way any more. They're dangerous, an' old Molly may not allus be near to save you. Molly isn't so bad as people says she is. They call her a devil. Would a devil save a man's life? They say Molly never forgives a wrong; well, neither does she even forgit a kindness. You didn't think *I* knowed *you*, Edward Stanton, did you? But I do. You befriended me once when you was a boy; it was a dozen years ago, but I haint forgot it. Do you remember when you was on the mountain after chestnuts, this very comin' fall twelve years ago, that you saw an ugly an' wretched-lookin' old woman fall an' hurt herself on a sharp stone, so that she could'nt git up again to walk to her home? an' d'ye remember that you run an' helped her up, an' that ye walked by her side, and supported her weak old body till she reached her miserable hut? That was me, Edward Stanton. You didn't know me. You didn't know I was old Molly Pry, the wicked old fortune-teller. You may not recollect my ugly old face now, but I remember yourn. Ah, I know that face well. It was a boy's face then, an' it is a man's face now. Still I remember it. Molly may remember an *injury* for a *long time;* but a *kindness* she will *never* forgit. Good-by, an' don't fool with rattlesnakes any more." And the old fortune-teller glided away, and soon disappeared among the thick laurel that grew a little way above.

CHAPTER XX.

THE THUNDERSTORM.

DELANY'S CAVE, which the berry-party, notwithstanding the shock some of their nerves had encountered, concluded to visit ere returning to the settlement, was situated then precisely where it is now; and as it is to-day, and as we have seen it, we will endeavor briefly to describe it.

At the margin of a cleared plateau that lies near the summit of the tall ridge, is a kind of basin, thirty or forty feet in diameter by twenty feet deep, scooped out by the hand of Nature. As you stand on the edge of the basin a dark aperture near the bottom—an opening in the earth about three feet in diameter—might almost escape your notice. But that narrow, rough, rock-bound aperture is the entrance to Delany's Cave. Descend the slanting side of the earth-basin, stoop, and peer into the dark opening, and you see a descending passage, bound with solid rocks, that takes its gloomy course, at an angle a little steeper than the mountain side, into the depths of the earth. Light a torch, and step carefully in upon the slanting floor of damp, rough rocks, for the floor is several feet below the aperture. Then walk down the passage, which gradually becomes wider and rougher, till you have left far behind you the little daylight that struggles in at the narrow entrance. Turn and look back, and you see only a little bright spot, that reminds you of a silver dollar. A few steps further, down, down, down, and the bit of daylight is seen no more; then you fully realize that your only dependence is the torch you carry. It matters not now what the hour is—it is all one here. The darkness is always the same thick, impenetrable gloom. Nor does it matter the

season of the year—whether winter or summer—the same cool, damp (but not cold) atmosphere is always prevalent here. It is not, perhaps, the pleasantest place in the world; but it is interesting. A drop of water will occasionally trickle upon you, but that is nothing.

At first your eyes can discern nothing but the torch itself; but gradually they become accustomed to the incessant struggle between the black darkness and the flaming light, and you find yourself able to fix your gaze with tolerable accuracy on objects around you.

When you have penetrated to the depth of five or six hundred yards you begin to encounter other passages. These grow more and more numerous as you descend. They run in all directions—at right angles, acute angles and collaterally; and it behooves you to mark well your way, and watch your light to see that it exhibits no signs of dying, or your chances of finding your way out will rapidly diminish.

All this time you are not descending a smooth, regular, or in any wise uniform slope. On the contrary, the way is rough, with ill-shapen stones, both fixed and detached—is somewhat winding, and at some points much steeper than at others. Now and then you encounter an abrupt offset of several feet, to descend which requires great care; after which you stand upon a kind of landing or shelf that extends horizontally a dozen feet, then terminates, perhaps, in another steep descent. Occasionally you pass a very narrow point, where projecting rocks on either side seem straining to meet half way, and effectually blockade the passage; but the next moment you emerge into a room so spacious that your torch will not cast its light from one wall to the other, and you can barely see the sparkling drops of water that hang upon the damp ceiling.

As for sounds, every foot-fall has a dozen rumbling echoes, and may even be heard rolling sullenly away among the passages; while a drop of water, trickling from some crevice and splashing into a tiny pool, is so distinctly heard that you

are fair to persuade yourself that it is a much larger drop of water than is seen in the outward world—as large as an ordinary marble, at least. Pick up one of the loose stones which occasionally rattle under your feet, hurl it down the passage, and with its rolling, and pitching, and tumbling from one point to another, and the many echoes it makes among the gloomy archways, you may not hear the last of it for five minutes.

When your light begins to flare up and settle down, now bright and dull by fits and starts, retrace your steps quickly and carefully, for in five or ten minutes you may be left in the grim darkness. When, as you are hurriedly retracing your steps, you perceive by the usual indications that your light cannot last a minute longer, you cannot say you feel exactly alarmed; but should you at that moment look up and find yourself just within sight of a distant bright speck, which you know is the mouth of the cave, you feel a degree of relief certainly equal to any trifling misgiving you may have experienced.

Some of the party, after what had occurred to the harum-scarum Ned, felt but little relish for further pleasure-seeking, and even proposed to give up visiting the cave, and return to their homes; but Ned, although it was impossible that he could feel quite well, would not hear to it. He insisted that the visit must not be given up on his account; that he felt very well—unusually so—and that he intended to visit the cave, whether any one else should or not.

One thing was decided, namely: that no more berries should be gathered that day—'t wasn't safe. One rattle-snake, about four feet long, had been encountered, and, no doubt, its mate was not far off—yes, and may be, half a dozen others and *their* mates. Accordingly, all proceeded on foot to the cave, leaving the horses where they had been all day.

After a walk of less than half a mile, they reached the plateau, which was then, as now, void of trees, and covered

with grass. Here, no longer protected from the sun, they for the first time realized how hot and oppressive the air was; and the view being no longer obstructed, they perceived that heavy clouds were beginning to thrust their inky edges above the western horizon.

"Oh, I fear it is going to storm!" said one of the girls.

"The air feels like it," responded one of the boys.

"And these black clouds that are rising in the west seem to favor the conclusion," said another.

"How terribly hot it is!" said Tilly Tate, speaking for the first time since her fright.

"Then," suggested Ned, "let us go into the cave; it is cool enough in there, I dare say."

"Might the storm come up before we come out?" queried a timid girl.

"No fear of that," was replied; "it is too far off. But come, let us go in."

Before leaving the wood some pine branches were cut and split up for torches. At the mouth of the cave these were lighted, with considerable difficulty, too—for the quick blaze of a lucifer match had not yet gleamed on the world—and with a corresponding waste of time. A torch comprised a small bundle of pine splinters held firmly together, or tied, when convenient. The party at last entered the cave, one after another, and carefully took their way into its dark recesses. Philip Kirke, who carried a large torch, walked boldly in advance, secretly resolved to explore the cave to its uttermost recesses, if his light should hold out.

"These foolish country people," he muttered, "think this quite a wonderful affair. I'll venture it could be hid in a corner of the cave I visited in Kentucky. Danger of being lost! Pooh! I should n't be surprised if I were to find its terminus before I return." And he strode on swiftly, yet carefully, down, down, down, step by step, till his torch disappeared from the rest of the party.

"Who is that going so far ahead?" asked George Roland.

"It must be Ned Stanton," replied Will Hampstead.

"No, it is 'nt, for here *I* am," put in the redoubtable Ned himself.

"Why, Ned," said George, in surprise, "it is a wonder it was n't you. How comes it you are not running ahead, risking your neck, as usual? I hope that snake affair—"

"How comes it *you 're* not?" retorted Ned. "I never yet put my neck in so much danger as you did yours at the White Rocks, when you carved your name, you know."

"I was a boy then," returned George, "and had no better sense."

At that moment George slipped and fell, extinguishing his torch, and scattering its fragments about. A laugh was enjoyed at his mishap, and he was rallied on account of his "awkwardness." His torch was irrevocably lost, but it could easily be spared, for Ned carried one, as did also several others near at hand. This dialogue, together with George's little mischance, had the effect of entirely banishing all thought of the adventurer who had gone ahead. He was forgotten.

The party moved slowly into the depths of the cave, till the advance reached the intricate passages a long way from the entrance. Not one half the party, however, had come so far. All the girls and a number of the young men had stopped at intervals on the way, to await the return of those who were "fonder of fun" than they.

After a while, when the lights seemed to be growing weary, the most adventurous began to retrace their steps, and in due time all were once more approaching the little bright spot that led to the outer world—all save one.

The sound of thunder greeted their ears, and abruptly recalled to their minds what they had entirely forgotten—that when they entered the cave, an hour before, there were indications of a coming storm. They at once began the work of evacuation, and the first one out ran up the side of the basin, and saw a sight calculated to appal any one who dreads a

storm. The sun had already been shut in behind great volumes of clouds that had rolled up from the western horizon, and the swift-winged lightnings were chasing each other hither and thither across the darkened heavens. Every peal of thunder sounded louder and nearer, and the threatening clouds, charged with fire and hail, grew blacker and blacker as they approached. As yet the air was still. Not a leaf quivered. The blades of grass still drooped, wan and dejected. But a kind of moaning sound could be heard in the direction of the approaching mass, clouds of dust could be seen rising from the settlement, and it was pretty clear that the element of wind would not be wanting to make the terror of the storm complete.

"Oh, let us hurry to the horses!" exclaimed one.

"Or remain at the cave for shelter," suggested Will Hempstead; "but then what would become of the horses?"

"They would all break loose and spill themselves down the mountain," responded Ned Stanton.

"Let us go at once to the horses," said Tilly. "Perhaps we can reach our house before the storm arrives."

"No doubt we can," said George Roland; "so come on, one and all, if you are agreed."

All now walked rapidly—almost ran—toward the horses; but they had not yet reached them when the wind, that came howling in advance of the storm, struck the face of the mountain, and the storm approached with increased swiftness. Big drops of rain, mingled with hail-stones, were beginning to patter upon the foliage; the lightning flashed vividly, and several such peals of thunder broke upon the mountain that it was a marvel that the old rocks could remain quiet and unmoved.

Amid wind, and rain, and hail, half blinded by the vivid lightning, and half stunned by the loud thunder, our bewildered adventurers mounted their horses—the girls not waiting to be assisted, but springing nimbly to their saddles—and rode away without much regard to military order; and it

was owing to this hurried and confused state of things that the absence of one of their number was unnoticed.

They were not a quarter of the way down the mountain when the angry storm burst forth in all its fury. The large hail-stones no longer dropped one by one, but came clattering among the rocks in swarms; the rain poured from the skies, dashed among the trees, and soon drenched the young travelers to the skin; the wind rushed with prodigious force against the side of the mountain, bending and tearing up many of the great trees, and wresting large branches from others, sending them crashing among the rocks. The thunder, no longer content to mutter only among the clouds, nor the lightning to traverse the face of the heavens, both descended as though intent to shiver and crush the tall mountains, and send them crumbling to the valleys below. Very Nature seemed to have gone mad. Her fiery teeth gnawed the stern rocks and split the more tender trees, while her savage growl was heard issuing from the black clouds which mantled her face.

The poor horses, terrified into very meekness by the raging storm, bore their riders down the mountains, trembling at every step—occasionally falling to their knees and struggling up again; and it was a wonder that no necks were broken ere they reached the valley.

In the midst of the storm the party arrived at Ira Tate's, turned the horses into the farm-yard, and rushed into the house for shelter; though, saturated as their garments already were, they might as well have remained without.

To recount their many breathless exclamations as they found themselves housed from the sweeping storm would be almost impossible. "Oh, dear!" "Well, I declare!" "Did you ever?" "If this don't!" "Well, I never!" "Oh, *isn't* this—" "I think I shall die!" "My bonnet, oh, my bonnet!" "I 'm half dead!" "My dress!" "My shoes!" and "My, oh, my!" were a few of the innocent expressions which burst

from the females; while the gentlemen, one and all, agreed that, taking everything into consideration, it "beat thunder.'

It did not escape the notice of the more observing that, since their arrival at the house, Mary White now and then gazed wistfully among the party, as though to seek out some missing one, and that, by and by, she betrayed increasing signs of uneasiness. The truth of the matter was, that Mary, poor girl, had missed her lover, and she felt a natural delicacy about openly expressing the fears which she felt for his safety. Could he have been thrown from his horse during the ride down the mountain, unnoticed by any one? Or could he have lost his way in the cave? and might he yet be wandering about among its dark passages? Oh, fearful thought!

"Where is Phil Kirke?" abruptly asked one of the party, as the storm began to subside.

The question pierced the heart of Mary like a keen dagger. Every one looked about him, and every one suddenly remembered that he had not seen Philip Kirke since the arrival at Ira Tate's. He was not there.

"I have not seen him since we came into the house," said one.

"Nor have I," said several others.

All began to manifest some concern, and Mary was evidently suffering the most intense anxiety.

"Could he have been thrown from his horse coming down the mountain?" suggested one.

"He might have been," replied nother, "without being seen. It was difficult to see anything."

"Did he leave the cave with us at all?"

"Sure enough! Who has even seen him since we left the cave?"

All were silent. No one had seen him since leaving the cave. Philip had been forgotten.

"Where is his horse?" was asked.

No one could tell.

"Oh, horror!" exclaimed several, in sudden consternation. "Can he have been lost in the cave!"

"Do n't be alarmed," said Ned Stanton, coolly; "if he is there he will find his way out in a day or two; or, if not, we will go up and help him. He has escaped a confounded ducking, if he *is* there; that is one advantage he has over us."

"Some one go and look if his horse is in the barn-yard," said Mary, unable to conceal her anxiety.

Ned, who knew all the horses in the country as well as he did the people themselves, took upon himself the task, and at once departed for the barn. He soon returned, and reported that the horse which Philip had ridden was not there.

"Oh, what has become of him?" exclaimed Mary, in an agitated voice, turning deathly pale.

"Laid down in the cave, no doubt, to take a nap," replied the unfeeling Ned, who had entirely forgotten his own mishap of the day. "Never fear; if he do n't make his appearance by to-morrow morning, a party of us will go up and find him out."

To-morrow morning! Philip to lie bleeding and senseless, perhaps, among the rocks of the mountain, or to wander distractedly about in the gloom of the cave till to-morrow morning! Oh, who can describe the feelings of the innocent girl who, by some strange freak of fate, loved the missing villain? —her bitter anxiety and gnawing dread? What would she not have given to see him step into the house and stand before her safe and well at that moment? Ah, had she known all, she might have hoped and prayed that he had gone from her sight forever!

It was near five o'clock. The rain and hail had ceased to fall, but the clouds still hung upon the mountains, and the thunder was yet heard reverberating among the congregated hills. A riderless horse, with saddle, but no bridle, was seen coming from toward the mountain.

"That 's Phil's horse!" exclaimed several.

"Has broken loose from where he was hitched," suggested Ned. "Pulled his bridle off in the operation."

"The storm is over; wont some of you go and look for him?" pleaded Mary.

"I'll go, for one," said Ned Stanton.

"And I, for another," rejoined George Roland.

"And I," said Will Hempstead.

"And I," "And I," came from all the young men of the party.

"Ned, perhaps *you* had better not go," suggested one of the girls. "You ought to keep as quiet as possible, since—"

"Pooh!" interrupted Ned. "You all seem to think that snake affair a fearful thing. What would you think to see a man bite a snake's head off, as I did once, and—"

"Do you mean that *you* bit a snake's head off, or that you only saw another do it?" queried one.

"Why," replied Ned, hesitating as to how great a shot he should make with the long bow, "why—I—I really do n't know which I meant—but it's all the same. Come, let us look to our horses, and hurry up the mountain in search of Phil. We may meet him on the way, though, for I should n't be surprised to learn that he left us during the storm, and took shelter under a pine tree. Come, we *may* have to go a long distance—clear to the cave, probably—and it is getting late."

The young men sought their horses, vaulted into the wet saddles, and hurriedly retraced their steps, watching carefully on their way up the mountain for any indications of the missing man. But, without seeing any trace of him, they reached the spot where the horses had been hitched during the day, where they found a bridle still fast to a sapling by the hitching-strap, while the severed throat-latch showed that the horse had slipped it over his head. It was then the unanimous opinion that Philip Kirke, the rider of the horse, was yet in the cave, and that the chances were against his ever coming out. All proceeded at once to the cave. Even-

ing was approaching, and the gloomy opening in the mountain frowned upon them like a living grave. What could be done? The cave must be searched as far as possible; but they had no means of striking a light. The pine branches were literally soaked with the rain, and to get them to burn would be next to impossible. It was decided that some of the party should return to the settlement, collect all the lanterns that could be had, and bring them to the cave, while a messenger should be dispatched to Weston to give the alarm there and get all the assistance possible—not forgetting to bring a quantity of twine or cord, which the party might trail after them when penetrating into the most intricate parts, by which to retrace their way, in case their lights should give out.

Nearly all of the crowd departed for the settlement, in order to put their plans into execution, while the few who remained entered the cave as far as they durst without lights, and shouted with all their power of voice, hoping against hope that the lost man might be within hearing, and reply. But the gloomy depths of the cave which yawned ahead gave back but the sullen echoes of their own voices. A long time they paused and listened. All was still as death—quiet as the grave.

CHAPTER XXI.

LOST!

LET us accompany Philip Kirke in his subterranean perambulations. He glances briefly behind him now and then, as he descends the dark, rough path, to ascertain if other torches are yet within sight. At length he has passed be-

yond sight of the other explorers, and is alone. His eyes have now become accustomed to the thick gloom of the cave, and objects begin to stand out pretty clearly in the coarse light of his torch. Very carefully he takes his way among the numerous passages, noting well the path he travels, that he may find his way out easily. Yet he moves not slowly. His long, firm strides carry him down the uneven path rather swiftly than otherwise.

"If I am expert," he mutters, "I may make some discovery—if there is any to be made here—or I may penetrate to the very terminus of this passage, and return to the party before they are ready to quit the cave. As my light is limited, too, I must crowd all the investigations I can into the smallest possible space of time. I wonder if I *could* find my way out easily in case my light should unexpectedly leave me. I must watch for the first indications it may show of approaching a close, and then will be my time to return. I would not care to risk myself so far in without a light. However, the party will not leave the mountain without me, I am sure; and should I lose my light and my way, they will come in search of me with fresh lights. Pooh! there 's no danger! This cave cannot be endless. Even in the dark I could find my way out in a few hours at most."

On goes the adventurer, step after step, lower and lower into the depths of the earth. A quarter of an hour passes away—twenty, twenty-five minutes—and he has not stopped yet. He still continues his explorations. What can he be thinking of? He is certainly running some risk in penetrating so far alone. He has passed many tributary caverns on his way, and they all stared gloomily at him as he stalked heedlessly by. He is now among winding passages, from which, should his light go out, he would find it difficult to extricate himself. He does not appear to think of that. On, on, down, down, he goes, looking alternately to the right and to the left, noting well the way. He has reached a point where the way is more level, and finally it no longer de-

scends. Still there is no end; it grows wider, and is traversed, at short intervals, by other passages. Philip is beginning to think that Delany's Cave is no small affair, after all, and might even be pronounced extensive.

Ah, he has stopped at last. Some new idea has evidently flitted across his brain. His attitude is that of a man listening for some danger; his very soul seems on the alert. His face looks strangely under the red rays of the light he holds, as if there were something of dread in that new thought.

"Hark!" he mutters. "What sound was that? Was it a groan?" He trembles now, for queer things revolve in his mind. "Why did I not think of that before? Confusion! I am losing nerve! Why did I come so far into the depths of the earth—alone? What a place this would be to meet a spirit!—if spirits do return to this world. If they do, what place so apt as this would the ghost of that murdered man select to terrify me! Hark! That sound again!"

He stands a moment trembling, pale and silent. A foolish dread, from which the guilty are never secure, has taken possession of him. There *is* a strange, hollow sound not far off, but its exact locality it is difficult to determine. It is like the moaning of the wind in some desolate place, or the distant murmur of the sea. It may be the outward breeze, heard through some tortuous crevice in the side of the mountain; or, perchance, some secluded rivulet that winds its way among the rocks, as it has done for ages without ever once seeing the light of day. A little stream, dancing through crevices and over small precipices, *would* emit an odd sound in the lonely cave—heard a little way off, of course. It cannot be a groan—that hollow sound. Possibly it strikes his guilty ear like a groan, because he suddenly remembers listening to the dying groans of an honest old man whom he murdered. That was in a cave, too, that scene of death, and he remembers that the groans of the suffering man sounded strangely; and this little sound he has just heard, and can

even now hear—though it grows louder and fainter at intervals—has brought them *so* forcibly back to his mind.

"I'll go back," he mutters, turning carefully about, that he may not hear the somber echoes of his own footsteps. "Yes, I'll return at once; to remain in this gloomy place ten minutes longer would make a coward of me. Oh, if I should chance to see a strange form—But nonsense! Hark! What's that?"

Merely a little pool of clear water, into which a glittering drop suddenly falls with its wonted echoes, causing its surface to quiver and sparkle in the light of the torch, and to assume, for an instant, to the eyes of Philip, some fantastic shape. He starts back in momentary alarm, slips from a stone upon which he has just stepped, and clumsily falls—scattering the pine sticks, which comprise his torch, all around him, leaving him in black darkness, with only a few dull-looking sparks staring mockingly into his face.

"A curse on the luck!" he exclaims, in a vexed tone; and hastily gathering up half a dozen of the scattered splinters, he places them together, and falls to blowing upon the red coals, with an energy the occasion demands.

But having fallen among the damp rocks, the fragments of the torch, which a moment ago burnt brightly, can no more be induced to emit a flame. The embers glow a little as each successive breath fans them, but during every interval they grow weaker and duller, dying out one after another, till, finally, the last spark glimmers, fades, and is gone—and darkness, indeed, reigns supreme in the great vaults of the mountain.

"Oh, Heaven!" gasps the vain explorer, fully realizing the terrible danger of his situation, and starting wildly up in the gloom. "If I *should* miss my way, what will become of me? A single mistake, a single deviation from the path by which I came, and I may wander far away beneath the mountains, till I fall down to die a lingering, a horrible death! I may be suffocated by foul air, stored in some of the passages, or I

may fall headlong into some deep pit! Oh, what would I not give to be out of this dark den once more! Why, this is more than mere total darkness. The gloom is thick and hard to breathe—seems compressed, crowded into a space too small to hold it. My very eyes are thrust deeper into my head by the pressure, and they pain me. But I must act. I must make an attempt to find my way to the mouth of the cave, and if I fail—Oh, Heaven! How dare I meet death!"

A few moments ago, while his torch was yet burning brightly, Philip Kirke imagined that it would be no serious affair to be left in darkness; but now that he finds himself surrounded on all sides by the gloom of the cave, he is already trembling with deadly fear. It is a remarkable fact, that when a man loses himself in some intricate place, the danger of his situation does not gradually impress him, but in an instant, and with bewildering effect, rushes upon him.

The alarmed adventurer begins to grope his way over the rough stones, now slipping and almost losing his footing, now coming in contact with the damp, rocky wall, or stepping into a pool of water—trembling all the while with apprehension. He feels tolerably confident that he is going in the direction of the only little aperture through which hope can beam upon him, for he is certainly ascending the slanting way; but there is danger that at some evil moment he may turn into the wrong passage, for in the darkness they are all alike. With a light he could easily find his way out, for he remembers the appearance of the passage by which he descended; but in the darkness, that black darkness, how fearfully are the chances against him! He may travel half an hour, and how is he to know that he is not on the wrong road, and that the time is not wasted? He may go on till he finds to a certainty that he *has* deviated from the right passage, he may retrace his steps—and how is he to know when he has returned to it? How does he know now that every step is not carrying him further and further from the right course, and deeper and deeper into the unexplored

caverns of the mountain? He may walk on until almost within sight of the opening, and he may think himself astray, and retrace his steps to try some other course. All these agonizing thoughts rush upon him in a moment, causing him to shudder still more with apprehension. He gropes on, thrusting out his hands before him and on either side, to feel for the rough walls. On, on, higher and higher. Surely he is in the right path. The distant mouth of the cave, with the light peering feebly in—oh, welcome sight!—must soon appear now. But no. The way suddenly ceases to ascend. He does not remember that on his way down he passed over any level ground. And yet he is groping his way along a horizontal passage. He follows it for fifty yards or so, and it does not begin to rise—but suddenly it falls off beyond, and Philip finds himself *descending* again!—descending into the heart of the mountain! Oh, the fearful reality stares him in the face—he has gone astray; he has wandered from the right passage, and how feeble the hope that he will ever find it again—that he will ever emerge from this living tomb, and stand again in the bright world without!

Almost wildly he turns about and retraces his steps. A true sense of his fearful situation has dawned upon him, and trembling in every joint as he again gropes his way in the direction from which he has just come, he cries out in mental agony:

"Oh, God! have mercy—have mercy on me! Oh, do not thus cut me off in my sins! Oh, do not let me die in this terrible place! Let me breathe the bright air of heaven once more!" and while he thus appeals to his Maker—probably for the first time in many years—he trembles more violently, and, notwithstanding the cool temperature of the air within the cave, great drops of perspiration are starting from his face.

On, on, on, upward again in the darkness; now descending again; now turning into some gaping cavern on the right, now another on the left; now stepping into a crevice

or gully, or stumbling over an obstructing rock; now slipping and falling, but springing up again with a renewed phrenzy, he strides—around and around, back and forth, half crazed, bewildered, losing all reckoning of time, distance and direction.

Hours have passed, and he has not yet seen the glimmering of daylight afar off; and at length he throws himself down in despair. He cries, curses, shouts, screams, tears his hair, rends his clothes, and clutches savagely at the silent stones on which he lies, till he is almost exhausted. The echoes of his voice die away, and quiet reigns as before.

At length he arises again, and resumes his wanderings. For a few steps he walks swiftly—almost runs—but suddenly coming in contact with the hard wall, or stumbling over some obstruction, he slackens his pace. Yet he wanders on—on, on, on. Another hour, and he stops again, and throws himself down.

"Ah," he mutters, with a strange calmness, "a fitting fate for me. Poor Henry White died in a cave, with no friend near him, and I must die here, with great mountains piled upon me—here, in this terrible place, where no ray of light can penetrate—my body and soul in darkness! Oh, why have they not sought me yet? Ah, I have wandered beyond their reach—pierced into the bowels of the mountains, probably, miles beyond all former exploration, and they will never reach me. Even my body will never be found. It will lie here and rot; the bones will whiten and finally crumble into dust, and still no one will come near. Oh, terrible fate! Oh, fearful thought! I cannot—I *will not*—I MUST NOT die yet!" he exclaims, springing frantically to his feet. "I dare not meet my Maker with such a load of guilt upon my soul! Mercy! Mercy! God, have mercy! Help! Help! Help!" he screams, rushing blindly away.

For half an hour he moves about, to and fro, hither and thither, scrambling over rocks, and rushing against sharp corners and ragged points, but all to no purpose. At length

he stops again, and, in the agony of despair, throws himself bruised and bleeding, upon the loose stones at his feet, crying hoarsely:

"Lost! Lost! Lost!"

Again he starts up, screams for help, tears his hair, scratches his face, wrings his hands, prays, curses, seizes large stones and dashes them about him. Some of them fly a long distance into adjacent passages, rattling, rolling and tumbling as they go; others strike the roof or wall near by, and fall to the ground. Their hollow echoes die away, and once more all is quiet.

"Lost! Lost! Lost!" gasps the wretched man, throwing himself upon the ground again. "Lost, lost, eternally and forever! Come, fiends! Come, devils! Gather around me, and fly away with my guilty soul, for hope is DEAD!"

But he rallies again. He does not rise, but he sits thinking if he might devise some means to communicate with the outer world. He thrusts his hands into his pockets to see what they contain—whether anything that might suggest some new idea. He finds a pencil and an old letter; then he wonders whether, if he were to write a few words on it, describing his situation, and cast it away, some stray current of air might not carry it out—absurd as it is—and—but, impossible! He has a large pocket-knife; might he not strike fire with it against a rock, ignite the letter, and use it as a torch? Impossible! Anyhow, it would last but a moment. Might the knife aid him in some other way? Might he not, by working steadily and patiently, cut his way through the many fathoms of rocks that are heaped above him? He actually thinks of trying it. Yet—nonsense! It is impossible. Why, a thousand knives would wear away at such a task, and years of time would be required for its execution. Ah, what else is that he finds in a side-pocket? A pistol—a common pocket-pistol. Can that aid him? Might he fire it against the roof, and might the force of the bullet, together with the concussion produced, loosen some of the rocks above,

and send them crumbling down until a crevice should open above, through which he might at least see the light of day once more? Foolish!

"Ah," he exclaims, as the faintest ray of hope beams upon him, "I have it! I'll fire the pistol! It will make a loud noise, and if any one is within the cave at all, it will be heard, and will point out the direction in which I am! Why, I declare, it may save me—yes, really SAVE ME! Bu—but—if this does not avail, then I am lost indeed."

He arises to his feet once more, elated with this new idea, and now, for the first time, discovers how weak he has grown. He can scarcely support himself. He feels that his strength must soon fail him entirely, should he resume his desultory wanderings. He cannot even hope to stand erect very long. Well, now for a grasp at the last straw. He draws back the hammer of the pistol, points the instrument from him, and pulls the trigger. Only a dull snap responds!

"The priming has become damp," he mutters; "but I think it will go. I will try it again; and setting the hammer, he again levels the weapon and pulls the trigger.

Bang! Hundreds of echoes roll through the dark labyrinth. They are heard for a minute reverberating among distant nooks and deep recesses, they die away, and all is still again. Philip listens eagerly for an answering sound—listens long and earnestly, scarcely daring to breathe. But there is no response. The dead silence mocks him. The thick gloom hangs about as before. The flash of the pistol disturbed it only for an instant, but did not dispel it.

"I'm lost!" whispers the miserable wretch hoarsely; and he dashes his pistol away.

It strikes the damp wall and falls with a dull clatter; but that is soon over, and all is quiet again.

A strange sensation thrills through the frame of the despairing villain; he trembles violently, his strength leaves him, his head swims, his heart flutters, and he begins to stagger and reel.

"Lost! Lost! Lost!" he shudders, and he falls swooning to the ground.

The loose stones rattle under him, but the sound speedily dies away. Then it is very quiet in the cavern. The dark curtain hangs heavy, and the tall arches and projecting rocks seem to be wrapped in sleep.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE RESCUE.

THE alarmed females of the pleasure-excursion remained at Ira Tate's till a number of the searching-party returned from the mountain and reported that the missing man was lost in the cave; then, with some sadness, they departed for home, ruminating on the adventures of the past day. All were fully persuaded that, taking into consideration the frightful affair among the whortleberry bushes, the wild storm, and, finally, the danger into which one of their number had run himself in the cave, the day's pleasures had been scarcely equivalent to its perplexities and pain.

After all had gone, poor Mary's sufferings were heightened almost to distraction. How painfully the approaching night brought back to memory a night of anxious watching which she had once before endured! How vividly did she now recall the terrible night during which she had watched with anxious longing for the welcome return of a father who never appeared again!

"Oh!" she mentally ejaculated, "if this night of waiting should terminate as that; if I should never see *him* again, as I never more saw my poor father, it would be *so* hard!

Then, indeed, would I be alone in the world! I think my heart would break! I could never smile again; I could never eat, never sleep, never rest, never enjoy myself—would always be weary, weary of life! Oh, God! grant he may be found! Grant he may return to me alive!" And Mary sought a quiet room of the large old house, sat down by the windows, wrung her hands and wept.

Thus began a second night of painful watching. We will not attempt to describe it. We can give no adequate idea of the long hours of mental anguish the unfortunate girl endured that night. Only those who have been placed in a similar situation can form a correct idea; and those who have not can but faintly imagine.

Night soon closed in; the clouds had rolled away, and the bright stars peeped out as merrily as ever. The hours began to drag wearily by, and, meanwhile, Mary saw lights moving along the road toward the mountain. A great many lights, in fact; she did not count them, but there must have been dozens—possibly scores. They were the dull lights of common lanterns, not apparently of more importance than the phosphorescent insects that were flitting about the meadows yet they imparted hope to Mary's sad and drooping spirits. She knew that strong, energetic men had gone to the cave to search for her lover, and that if it was possible to save him they would succeed. She watched them eagerly till they began to ascend the mountain, and till the lights were hidden among the foliage—through the openings of which they however, still peeped forth at intervals, like the fire-flies to which we have compared them; but now the road over which they had just passed became so very dark and quiet again, and the hours began to drag so heavily by, that hope declined again.

None of the inmates of the old farm-house retired. They remained in a front room, which was lighted by several candles, determined to await the return of those who had gone in quest of the missing man. Ira proposed to accompany

them to the cave, but Aunt Eliza informed him that he was an old man, and should n't go wandering about in the damp cave, when there were plenty of young men to do it. Moreover, she argued that it would not be safe for three defenseless females to be left alone in the house. Ira succumbed without a word. He attached great importance to anything Aunt Eliza said; for he firmly believed that such a good, industrious and sensible woman, and one, withal, who could cook every dish so perfectly, and make such excellent pies as Aunt Eliza, must be infallible. She *was* a systematic housekeeper, and since her advent into Ira's homestead, all domestic affairs had been so admirably conducted that he thought her, since the death of his wife, the greatest woman in the world.

Mary was not disturbed in the little upstairs front room which she had selected as the scene of her lonely watch. The others of the family well knew her earnest attachment to Philip, felt confident that they were "engaged," and even suspected that "the day" was fixed upon. None ever questioned, or attempted to interfere with her. Indeed, Ira was very favorably impressed with Philip; and Aunt Eliza herself acknowledged that he was an engaging young fellow, and Mary would probably do as well to "throw herself away" on him as on any other; for it seemed young ladies *would* marry, despite all advice, and the promptings of their better sense—if they had any—to the contrary.

"The very witching time of night" passed, and a weary hour followed it; but just as the old clock chimed One! the wakeful girl, from her lonely post, observed faint lights glimmering upon the mountain; and ere long a number of horsemen, some of whom carried lanterns, appeared upon the road in the direction of the towering hills; then she knew that the men who had gone in quest of her lost lover were returning.

"Oh! have they found him! or have they given him up for lost!" she exclaimed, in trembling suspense.

She dreaded to stir from the window, and so sat there till the horsemen arrived at the gate.

"Hilloa!" called out a lusty voice; and Ira opened the door and hastened down to the gate.

"Have you found him?"

Mary, who could hear every word from where she sat, imagined that an age elapsed before the reply came.

"Yes," was the brief reply.

"Where?"

"In the cave."

"Is he hurt?"

"He is insensible, having no doubt met with a fall; but he may not be seriously hurt. We had better leave him in your house, and send the doctor here from Weston."

"Certainly," said the hospitable Ira.

Mary, still at the window, joyfully concurred.

"I must go down," said she; "it will not look well if I don't. I must be careful not to betray too much feeling, or that wont look well either."

Oh, adverse fate! That this man should return to the innocent and unsuspecting girl, who watched for him, and that the loving father for whom she had watched with equal anxiety should have remained away for ever!

Philip was carried up the lawn into the house, and laid upon a bed in a spare room. Mary, who had come down, observed that his face was very pale and somewhat bruised.

"I will start home at once and send the doctor," said Will Hempstead; and, joined by several others, he mounted his horse and rode rapidly toward Weston.

Soon after, Ned Stanton took an affectionate leave of Tilly, assuring her that she had not the slightest cause to feel concerned about him; that the wound he had received from the serpent would no doubt prove a physical benefit to him inasmuch as it had "let a little of the bad blood out" of his system; and he, also, departed for home, accompanied by many others: for all were weary with the exertion of the

day and night. George Roland, John Duffey, and three or four more, concluded to remain till the doctor should arrive. At the request of Miss Tilly, they gave an account of their search, which was, in brief, as follows:

When the messengers returned from the settlement with lanterns, *et cetera*, the whole party entered the cave and explored until the scattered fragments of Philip's torch were found where he had fallen and extinguished his light. They supposed that he had, of course, gone no further after this accident, and that, in attempting to return in the darkness, he had lost his way among the wilderness of passages which he had encountered. They at once began to explore the caverns on the right and on the left; and it was only their numbers that prevented *their* getting into a maze. Hours of fruitless search passed away, and they were beginning to think the case a hopeless one, when Ned Stanton, who had at that time penetrated some distance in advance of the others into a passage that ran off at an acute angle from the main one, thus taking its way deeper into the heart of the mountain, retraced his steps suddenly, and imparted to the nearest of the party the fact that he had indistinctly heard something like the report of a pistol; that it had sounded a long way ahead,—probably a mile,—and he expressed his opinion that it was a signal of distress from the lost man. As it was feared the lights would not last long enough to go such a distance and return, twenty or thirty of the party returned to the exterior of the cave and cut as many pine branches as they could carry. With these, fires were built at regular intervals as they advanced, and a number of the party appointed to replenish them and keep them burning. Thus slowly, surely and safely, they pierced far into the hitherto unexplored vaults; and finally, in a word, found the insensible form of Philip Kirke, lying upon a bed of damp loose stones. With much difficulty they performed the tedious task of carrying him from the cave and placing him upon a horse, after which they conveyed him slowly and carefully

down the mountain. It was the prevailing opinion that his insensibility had been occasioned by a fall.

The sufferer betrayed signs of returning vitality before the doctor came, and, when that professional gentleman did arrive, was soon resuscitated. At first, he found it difficult to persuade himself that it was not all a frightful dream; but convinced that it was not, his astonishment that he had awaked in a no-more-than-comfortably *warm* locality was only equaled by his joy.

The doctor pronounced his physical condition not at all dangerous, stating that he was only prostrated by weakness, the result of undue excitement and exertion; that he had received some merely nominal contusions by falling or coming in contact with projecting rocks in the cave, and that he had swooned more from exhaustion than from any hurt he had sustained. He advised that he should remain quiet for a day or two, and prescribed no medicine save stimulants.

"He will be as well as ever," said the doctor, when he had left the room of his patient, "in three or four days at most, unless fever should be the result of his nervous excitement, which I do not anticipate. If any unfavorable symptoms show themselves, you may send for me. And with these directions to Ira, the doctor departed.

Philip was well cared for during the day which followed. He was visited by a number of his young associates from Weston in the course of the day, and, when night came, others arrived. He was a little feverish during the afternoon, and the early part of the evening; but by ten o'clock he had become quite composed, and soon fell asleep. Finding that his sleep was quite natural, and likely to continue, the neighbors left.

Philip awoke early next morning feeling almost well. He arose, took a brief ramble among the neighboring woods, on which there was not much dew that morning; and on returning to the farm-house, found himself able to do ordinary justice to a good breakfast. As the morning wore away, he

sat in the plain little sitting-room, looking through the open window toward the road, and gazing over some green fields that lay beyond. The rain and storm of two days previous had revived vegetation, cooled and purified the air; and it was really a pleasant summer morning. By and by, Mary entered, and with some sewing, or other light domestic work, took a seat by one of the windows.

"I am glad you are so well this morning," she remarked.

"I knew I would soon be well," returned Philip. "Had I not met with a fall or two while in the cave, I would not have been indisposed at all. In truth, I have no doubt I would have been able to find my way out. I fear I caused you some anxiety by straying away."

"I was, indeed," replied Mary, "very anxious, from the moment I missed you till I knew you were safe. But for the fierce storm that was just on us when we returned to the mouth of the cave, I should have detected your absence at once: but we all hurried away to the horses, and it soon began to storm so terribly that we could scarcely see at all. I really do not know how I found my horse, or how I managed to get on; I do not remember anything about it. But so soon as we found ourselves under shelter, I began to look for you, and to my apprehension could not find you."

"I knew you must be very anxious; that thought gave me more concern while I was wandering about in the cave than the danger of my own situation," said Philip, trying his hand at lying.

"That is just like you," Mary replied.

There was a pause of a minute's duration, after which Philip asked:

"Did all manifest great solicitude for my safety—Ned Stanton, Roland, and all those fellows?"

"Yes, all. Ned seemed to have forgotten his own ills, and he and George Roland were the first to start in quest of you. Will Hempstead was very active, too; so was John Dutton,

who came from the village as soon as he heard that you were probably lost. He was not with our party, you know."

"I know," returned Philip. "He don't appear to care for parties any more. I think he is going to marry that New Market girl."

"I am sure of it."

"What a beautiful morning it is," Philip observed.

"Lovely. The storm has cooled the atmosphere, and the rain has imparted new life to the green things."

Another pause.

"Where is Tilly," Philip asked, presently.

"At the spring-house," I believe.

"Churning, probably," ventured Philip.

"Yes."

"I have not seen your aunt since breakfast."

"She is still in the kitchen setting things to rights. She could not live if she were not working continually."

"I think your uncle went out to the fields."

"Yes."

"Industrious old man he is,—and so strong and vigorous yet. What is his age?"

"He is well-nigh sixty."

"He is seldom sick, I should judge?"

"Never."

Another pause.

"Mary!"

Mary turned quickly toward the speaker.

"Why," he went on, "I was just thinking that—I wondered whether we would—when would be the best, in fact the most appropriate, time for—for"—

"For what?" Mary asked.

"Our marriage."

Mary blushed.

"I was thinking," he went on, "that—would Christmas—or the following spring be—be—most—"

Mary blushed again, and replied:

"You are kind not to press me; and if I should say wait till spring, I am sure you would agree?"

"Your pleasure shall be mine."

"Then let it not be till May. My father will then have been dead two years. By allowing two years to elapse before marrying, I will show that I have not lightly forgotten him."

"Well spoken, Mary," Philip replied; "I love you all the more for that. And while I am waiting for the happy day, the thought that I am waiting for one who is thus dutiful to the memory of her father, will serve to augment the pleasure of anticipation."

Mary blushed again. Strange how young ladies *do* blush when discussing matrimonial affairs. But they do; and it becomes them, too.

"Is that an almanac hanging there?" Philip presently asked.

"Yes; do you want it?"

"A moment."

Mary took it from its place and tossed it playfully toward Philip, who, catching it adroitly, turned over some of the leaves, referred to a particular page for a moment, then observed:

"The first day of last May was Thursday; the first of next May will therefore be Friday. Now, we might set the exact day, you know, and—"

"It was on the twelfth of last May, a year ago, that I sat up watching for father. Let it be fully two years after that terrible night—the thirteenth, for instance."

"That will come on Wednesday."

"Well, Wednesday is not an unlucky day."

"I believe not; though I have heard that Tuesday is. So, Wednesday, the thirteenth, is to be the day?"

"Yes."

"Shall we keep it quiet?"

"Oh, yes! let us give every one a surprise!"

"Then we will let no one know of it till it is over."

"Agreed."

"When the time begins to draw near, we will even pretend to have grown distant, and that we no longer care for each other—that the surprise may be the greater."

"So we will."

And so it was agreed.

Next day, Philip felt well as ever, physically, and bad as ever morally; and in this delightful condition returned to Weston.

He did imagine, while wandering hopelessly and helplessly in Delany's Cave, a few days previously, that should he escape the horrible fate that stared him in the face, he would willingly thereafter abandon his wicked and treacherous pursuits, and become a moral man. But now he was safe and well again, and—"thought better of it.' He was already a murderer, he reasoned, and his course of life was clearly pointed out by Fate; he must continue to lead a life of crime. He further argued that he was under no obligations to Providence for his rescue from the cave; that he owed all to the sagacity of Ned Stanton, John Duffey, and others, (though he refused to admit, even to himself, that George Roland tried very hard to find him).

An apt illustration of his case, is the cant little verse—

"When the devil was sick,
The devil a saint would be;
When the devil got well,
The devil a saint was he."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE MAD-DOG.

We will now glance briefly at three or four weeks following the events narrated in the last chapter.

The harvest was well-nigh reaped, the grain would soon be ready for thrashing, and Philip Kirke began to busy himself making contracts for wheat, rye and corn, for the Pittsburg market. He also visited Pittsburg toward the latter part of August, and made arrangements with dealers there to dispose of the produce. On his return from Pittsburg, he gave Mary White several presents which he had purchased there, among which was a spyglass.

"With this," said he, "you can take an accurate view from the White Rocks."

Mary thanked him warmly, and assured him that it would be an additional incentive to visit the picturesque observatory. Ah, what a worthless glass! It magnified twenty or thirty fold, but it did not enable Mary to see the true character of the man to whose keeping she had confided her earthly happiness. Nor did it enable her to peer into the future, and perceive that itself was an instrument in the hands of fate to encompass her destruction. No, it was not a magic glass, her eyes were but mortal, and she only the more magnified the spirit of the wicked man she loved.

Philip did not neglect his friends at the den. He visited them frequently, sometimes as an equestrian, and sometimes as a boatman, always preserving the greatest caution. He did not impart to his confederates the full extent of the fearful peril through which he had passed in Delany's Cave,

merely stating, in a casual way, that he had "come near getting lost there:" nor did he inform them that the day was fixed for his marriage; but he *did* give them to understand that it would be no special occasion for astonishment if they should hear of his "getting married one of these days."

As for the robbers, they were not entirely idle, though they entertained a "wholesome dread" of the immediate locality of Weston. They now made frequent incursions into Greene county, which the boat moored in their little haven rendered easy. They robbed several houses in the vicinity of Waynesburg, succeeding in obtaining a considerable sum of gold and silver; and they also waylaid several peddlers and travelers with eminent pecuniary success. All this, however, was in Greene county, and all were led to believe that the mysterious robbers had removed to the west bank of the Monongahela. The people of the Weston settlement congratulated themselves that the outlaws no longer threatened them, little dreaming that their audacious leader still made his home at the village tavern.

George Roland's Company still retained its organization. It was the intention of all its members to make an excursion in search of the supposed new rendezvous of the robbers when the weather should become a little cooler. George, himself, was actuated by the most manly and disinterested motives, his chief object being to contribute to the general security and welfare of his own and adjoining settlements. He did not know then how greatly it would have redounded to his own interest and happiness to have solved at once the mystery connected with the unknown robbers, and to have brought them all to speedy justice.

Ned Stanton, notwithstanding his avowed anticipations to the contrary, was quite ill for a week after his experiment with the rattlesnake; but he never would acknowledge that his indisposition was the result of the bite he had received. He contended that it was occasioned by the warm weather,

stating that he invariably had a "little sick spell" in August, although all who had known him from his childhood averred that he had never before been unwell a day. About the last of August, having quite recovered, he and his friend Dick met one evening at Tony Baily's, and had a long chat, Ned, as usual, doing the most of the talking.

"You have not wound up that matter yet, have you?" Dick made out to ask.

"You mean what I promised you last fall?—no, not quite; but—"

"I do n't suppose there is any danger of—"

"What?"

"Getting enamored yourself, you know."

"Me! Nary time! No fear of that, Dickey! The oftener I see her the less likely I am to fall in love with her, you may rest assured of that. But I 'm holding off a little, you know, that the punishment, when I do administer it, may be the more severe; do n't you see? Now, the fact is, I *have* made up my mind to bring the matter to a crisis before long—sometime this winter, anyhow. I 've got the whole programme marked down in my upper story, and I 'll act it out, you may depend. My plan is nearly ripe for execution. I feel sure she is deeply in love with me now, and in another month or so she will adore me—positively *adore* me!—for I 'm not the worst looking fellow in the world, by any means, though I do say it myself; and I take it that when I undertake to make an impression—in fact— But no matter. As I was going to remark, just when her affections have risen to the loftiest pitch,—just when her heart is about to leap out with love, and come running at me,—when her hopes are soaring to the clouds,—when she is confident from outward indications that I am on the point of proposing,—ay, even while her tongue is beginning to move, and her lips to part for the formation of the sweetest 'yes,'—I 'll thrust her hopes to the earth. I 'll coolly say that, if she has no objections, I 'll withdraw my attentions from her in the future;

that I once thought seriously of matrimony, but that I'm getting rather old now; that, moreover, I never supposed she recognized my devoirs as more than those of a friend. Of course she can't say a word,—she can't say yes she did, or any thing of that sort. Nor can she implore me to think better of it, or tell me she loves me, or ask *me* to marry *her*. 'Tis n't leap-year, anyhow; and I reckon she possesses too much womanly delicacy for that. I say, Dick, old boy, I 've got her, nice! Won't you be revenged completely? Hey! When she so suddenly and unexpectedly finds that there is no hope of a matrimonial alliance with me; that her last chance is gone, and that the life, death and funeral of an old maid stares her in the face,—all these horrors bursting upon her startled senses, in one moment, will pay her up most delightfully, with compound interest, for all the disappointment and pain she once inflicted on you! What do you say?"

Dick nodded solemnly.

"Well, so it shall be," resumed Ned. "When I undertake any thing, especially for a friend, it 's going to be done. My plans are arranged, the mine is laid and ready to be sprung at the most favorable and effective moment, and Ned Stanton is the boy to pull the wire; on that you may depend. Oh, Dick, it 'll be glorious! It will be such fun you know. I 'll get half tight when the time comes, that I may act my part to a charm. You may look for glorious news one of these days, old fellow! Glorious!—or my name 's not Ned Stanton! Let 's take a drink!"

After a further discourse of several hours, Ned left for home, while Dick repaired to *his* home.

At Tony Baily's things went on as usual. It was a dull season of the year with Tony, and at times he felt tempted to "shut shop" during the day, and repair to some neighboring harvest-field. But for travelers who frequently stopped over night, and a regular boarder or two, he would have found the hotel business very unprofitable at this time.

Altogether, however, he lived very comfortably the year round, within his income; and good humor and contentment were his characteristics.

John Duffey visited New Market rather oftener than there was any obvious call for, and on returning late, as usual, one evening, it was his lot again to encounter three highwaymen, one of whom he knocked sprawling with the loaded end of his riding-whip, escaping from the others by riding swiftly away. The one whom he honored with the blow was Bill Hardin, of the cave, whose evil genius he verily seemed to be. The ruffian was so enraged that he swore the most horrible oaths that he would be avenged on the daring young man who had so often thwarted him, and whom, on this occasion, he recognized. It seems that Bill and two of his companions were, on this occasion, waiting for a traveler who was to pass that way on the evening in question, and mistaking Duffey for the man attacked him; but he being always on the alert, while traveling the country roads after nightfall, they only came off second best, as stated. Bill was not only aware that John Duffey was one of the two young men who had broken his head and carried him a captive to Weston, nearly a year before, but he had also learned from Philip Kirke, that the same young man was he who thwarted the attempt of himself and companions to rob his father's store; and now, that he had a third time received such rough treatment at the hands of the offending youth, his rage was almost uncontrollable, bursting forth in the most profuse vows of vengeance.

About the last of August, the security and quiet of the public were seriously disturbed by the advent of a rabid dog into the Weston settlement. Its victims among the sheep and cattle were quite numerous, as also among animals of its own race; and, sad enough to relate, one human—a little girl of six or seven—fell a victim to the terrible disease of hydrophobia. Her fearful sufferings, the dreadful scenes of her death struggle, and the heart-rending anguish of her

parents, brothers and sisters, we would not pain the reader by describing. The circumstance was soon noised abroad, and the dog, which was still at large, became a ten-fold terror to the inhabitants. All who owned dogs—and nearly every one did—either killed them, fearing that they might have been bitten by the mad-dog, or placed them in strict confinement. Many a poor canine suffered death because he chanced to growl at the cat, or because he panted lustily during the heat of the day, while his moist tongue hung from his mouth as he lay in the shade—facts which in unsuspicious times would have passed unnoticed. But now, every one was on the alert. Every one scrutinized closely any "sagacious animal" he chanced to possess; and did he happen to observe that the eyes of one looked a little red, or that his canineship displayed any sullenness, or the least disposition to growl or bark at the feline occupants of the premises, he would regard it as an unmistakable sign of approaching madness. Then would follow a mysterious taking down of the rifle from its brackets, a careful loading of the same, a walking out into some adjacent wood followed by the unsuspecting, obedient and doomed animal; and—the sharp crack of a rifle: "That tells the tale."

Even *persons* who at any time evinced an ill or snappish humor were regarded with suspicion, and studiously avoided. Hydrophobia was the universal bug-bear from morning till night, and even the nocturnal repose of the honest inhabitants was disturbed by grim visions of the great black mad-dog.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE "RAISING."

DOES the reader know what a "raising" is? Has he ever witnessed one?—ever participated in one? For the edification of the uninitiated, I will briefly state what a raising is.

In the rural districts, when a building of any kind is in course of construction, and when the timbers are all hewn and ready to occupy their places, the neighbors are invited to assemble and unite their strength in hoisting them up and adjusting them, as intended by the practical architect.

On such occasions, the owner of the embryo building, as a matter of courtesy, furnishes for his neighbors an excellent dinner—or supper, as the case may be—and altogether they have a good time of it. The greatest merriment always prevails on such occasions, and a raising is regarded as a real recreation. Many years ago, it was the custom to provide, in addition to the tempting meal, a quantity of liquor; and so the affair usually wound up with considerable of noisy mirth, and not unfrequently a fight or two.

On a pleasant Saturday afternoon in September, there was a raising in Weston. Mr. Duffey, the enterprising storekeeper of the village, was having erected, near his store, a large building, as a receptacle for all kinds of country produce, in which he was getting to deal pretty extensively. It was to be a frame building, and the girders, beams, braces, plates, posts, sleepers, sills and studdings, lay ready, near at hand, to be raised to their respective places. All the young men, and most of the middle-aged, of the neighborhood were present, and it was quite a "big day" in Weston. Muscle was not

wanting, and the work was performed in a few hours, without the slightest accident.

When all was finished it wanted yet an hour of the supper time, and the men set about spending the interim in drinking and gossiping.

To say that "a few boys" were collected about the point of attraction would be rather feeble language, inasmuch as it would fall far short of expressing the real state of things with regard to the juveniles. All the boys of Weston and the immediate neighborhood, six years old and upwards, were assembled about the new structure, and anything like a faithful account of the games of marbles, and the like, played that afternoon, and the startling gymnastics performed among the naked timbers of the building, as soon as raised, would, of itself, constitute a respectable volume.

Ten minutes had elapsed since the last pin was driven, when all were startled by the fearful cry of:

"Mad-dog! Mad-dog!"

Probably one-half the crowd had just been discussing the interesting subject of the rabid dog, and the cry reached them with a novel effect. Men scrambled up and perched themselves among the timbers of the building, some of the large boys did the same, while children of various sizes ran screaming to the nearest houses. Fathers and mothers were seen here and there hastily taking their children in from the street, after which they locked the doors, just as though the dog would be likely to reach up and raise the latches, as a certain wolf was once known to do.

Yes, a large black dog entered the village, at the upper end, and came trotting down the street, his eyes red and glaring, his tail almost trailing upon the ground, his mouth open, and the white foam standing upon his lips, and dropping from his protruding tongue. One who had met the untamed lion, with unflinching nerve, might well have dreaded an encounter with that worse than poisonous monster.

Several shots were fired at the terrible brute, as he passed

down the street, but without effect; and he probably would have gone through the village unhurt, but that, to the horror of all, a little child of three or four years was suddenly observed sitting directly in his path, playing with some little toy, all unconscious of its danger: seeing which, George Roland seized an adz belonging to the carpenter, rushed out upon the beast, when he was within a few steps of the child, and, with one carefully-aimed blow, stretched him out lifeless.

The child was one which had strayed away from its home in another part of the village, and was thus unobserved by its parents. The carcass of the dog was carefully removed and buried without the village.

The excitement occasioned by the mad-dog was beginning to subside, and the feast was not quite ready yet, when a country lad, of thirteen or fourteen, entered the village, carrying upon his arm a basket of watermelons, which he proposed to sell. The market proved good, and, of the half dozen his basket first contained, he sold three in—to use a mild expression—no time. He did a cash business exclusively, and at the conclusion of each bargain had the satisfaction of pocketing a piece of silver, whose value was twelve-and-a-half cents. He was certainly doing a thriving business, and all things augured well.

But alas! what age of the world is there on record during which business men were perfectly secure from commercial panic? How little did this youthful financier imagine that a dark cloud was about to burst forth in a tempest of fury, to accomplish his pecuniary ruin?

He was about to take a fourth melon from his basket to exhibit to a probable customer, when he discovered, to his consternation, that instead of three, which he supposed he had left, after selling three, and which, by all rules of arithmetic, he should have had, *only two of the fruit remained.* In a moment the thought flashed upon him that three and two don't make six, by any means, and he at once drew the

inference that one of the boys who gathered around him had basely abstracted one from the basket.

The panic had come!

"Where 's my tother watermelon?" he fiercely demanded.

There was no reply; but an obvious inclination to "snicker," on the part of the numerous boys who stood around, rendered it pretty clear to the business mind of our young country friend that he was the victim of the most foul and barefaced hocus pocus.

"Where 's my watermelon?" he repeated, indignantly, setting down his basket.

Several of the boys now replied, that they did n't know—indeed they did n't, nor had n't the slightest idea; and they winked at one another.

"Some feller's stole it!" vociferated the outraged young man; "who is it? Show me the boy. I 'll chaw him up! I 'll smash his face! I 'll tear—I 'll—"

Pop! went the stolen melon, at that moment dropping upon the ground and bursting open, having accidentally slipped from its place of concealment beneath the coat of the audacious thief, a mischievous youth, whose name was Calvir Wistar.

The murder was out. It was Cal who had stolen the melon. The evidence of his guilt had fallen at his feet. With the savage energy of an enraged tiger, the country boy rushed upon Calvin, who, finding it impracticable to retreat, hastily prepared for the onset. A blow or two was struck; then they "clinched;" a struggle ensued, and down they went, amid the plaudits of the youthful lookers-on, rolling over and over, pinching, scratching, biting and "gouging," with an energy equal to the occasion. It was becoming quite interesting, when some of the more sedate interposed, and separated the sanguinary combatants.

Meanwhile, the other boys proceeded to make a quiet repast, not only of the melon which had fallen from beneath the culprit's coat, but also of the two remaining in the basket.

Having done so, they proceeded, by way of a little innocent sport, to "pelt" each other with the disembodied rinds; which proved quite an engaging pastime, till Master Henry Duffey (John's brother) threw a large piece, and struck Master Samuel White a rather livelier blow on the chest than that gentleman thought the occasion called for. The latter accordingly retaliated, by seizing the missile and hurling it with all his might at the offender, whom it unfortunately struck between the nose and chin. This caused a "coolness" to spring up between the two which speedily merged into actual anger; and it was not more than two seconds till they began to pomel each other with those "nature's weapons," fists. They were about equally matched, and the fight might have furnished some interesting scientific developments, had it been allowed to proceed.

They were speedily surrounded by the men, some with the intention of interfering, and others of seeing the fun. George Roland was the first to reach them, and he at once thrust them apart. Philip Kirke, however, who had been drinking more than usual, came up immediately after, and insisted that the boys should be allowed to fight it out. The reason of this was, that he imagined young White, who was Mary's cousin, to be gaining an advantage at the moment they were separated, and that George had interfered on that account, with a view to giving him (Philip) a little thrust.

"The boys shall not fight!" said George.

"How do you know that?" asked Philip, stung at being thus openly and stubbornly opposed.

"Because I will not allow them," George responded, still standing between the juvenile antagonists.

"But I will," said Philip.

"And I won't," retorted George.

"Oh! you need not think to frighten me," returned Philip, "You have no right to interfere; so, you had better stand aside."

"Stand aside! Ha! ha!" laughed George.

"Yes, stand aside!" repeated Philip, and he advanced, half menacingly.

"There will be another fight, if you are not careful," hinted George.

"There will, eh! I'm willing! Come on, you cursed—"

Like a lion, George rushed upon his enemy. He aimed a heavy blow at his face, which Philip barely succeeded in parrying, and not feeling himself prepared for another, sprang backward, and very naturally fell prostrate over Mr. Duffey's cellar-way, which, fortunately for him, happened to be closed. Half maddened by this mishap, he sprang to his feet, and threw off his coat for a general engagement, determined to stand his ground, and fight to the bitter end. But mutual friends interposed, and prevented further hostile movements. The supper was now announced, the party gathered around the long table, which was set in the midst of a little grove of fruit trees near Mr. Duffey's dwelling, and good feeling and harmony were soon apparently restored, on all sides.

The viands and delicacies which had been provided would have done no discredit to any table anywhere; and while all conducted themselves within the bounds of common etiquette and good breeding, there was no unnatural restraint. There was hilarity without vulgarity, and the satisfying of good appetites without any approach to gluttony; and, in the midst of all, the kind host received that due respect from his guests which is prompted by natural good sense and manliness.

About the time of which we write, a rustic poet flourished in Weston. He was a lad of sixteen, whose name we have never been able to ascertain. Whenever any amusing or ridiculous circumstance occurred at the village, this obscure Byron was sure to "get up" a "good thing" on it. After much difficulty, we have succeeded in obtaining a copy of an elaborate "article" he wrote on the affair which we have just described, and it may not be out of place to insert it here.

"THE WATERMELON RIOT.

"This place can't very well be beat
For brawls and riots in the street;
And I will tell you of a fight
That did the people all excite.

"There was a raising in the town,
Which called the folks from miles around;
And men and boys from far and near,
To have a time, had gathered here.

"A country boy, to make it pay,
Brought watermelons here that day.
He took them in the crowd to sell,
And for a while succeeded well.

"As melons come but once a year,
And consequently sell quite dear,
Cal Wistar thought it would be fun
To *hook* the very nicest one.

"So, while the boy was making sale,
Cal slipped one under his coat-tail,
And when the owner saw 't was gone,
Stood innocently looking on.

"The melon-boy began to swear,
To stamp, and foam, and rave, and tear;
'Show me,' he cried, 'the sneakin' felon
That 's took an' stole my watermelon!'

"Just then there was a rousing pop!
For Cal had let the melon drop;
The boy then forward stepped a pace,
And hit him, zip! upon the face.

"There was some savage fighting then,
Which soon attracted all the men,
Who rushed to where they heard the noise,
And thrust apart the angry boys.

"Meanwhile the town-boys gathered all,
And ate the melon Cal let fall;
Then straightway to the basket flew,
And soon devoured the other two.

"So, when this cruel deed was done,
They thought to have a little fun;
They threw the melon-rinds around,
Pelting each other most profound

"Now, Henry Duffey raised a fight,
For with a rind he hit Sam White,
Who picked it up—oh, sheer disgrace!—
And slammed it in Hen Duffey's face.

"Then was there an astounding fight
Between Hen Duffey and Sam White;
Down they went, rolling on the ground,
While quite a crowd collected round.

"George Roland quickly stopped the fray,
But Kirke told him to go away;
Thus followed soon a bigger row,
For those two men got at it now.

"George Roland fiercely blazed away,
But Phil knocked off his lick, they say,
Then backward sprang, and jumped clean o'er
The top of Duffey's cellar-door;

"Then called his foe a 'tarnal cuss,'
And swore he 'd have a real muss;
Straightway he threw aside his coat,
Just as George took him by the throat.

"But when their wrath was clearly seen,
The crowd of people jumped between,
And said they should not fight it out,
For fights enough had been about.

"So Kirke put on his coat again;
George Roland, too, cooled down—and then,
From what I hear I 'm led to think,
The whole crowd went and took a drink.

"It was a watermelon, then,
That caused the row 'mong boys and men.
If melons raise such squabbles here,
I 'm glad they come but once a year."

CHAPTER XXV.

A TERRIBLE NIGHT.

Now, as it was a kind of holiday, Ned Stanton considered it a perfectly justifiable occasion for getting very drunk, and, therefore, did. He imbibed with very little restraint during the whole afternoon, and when supper came, and he sat down among the rest to discuss the viands and the delicacies, he was only enabled to find the way to his mouth by his long familiarity with that road. Nor was he quite infallible on that point, notwithstanding the innumerable journeys he had made during his career from time to time; for it is on record that on this occasion he several times fell short of the desired point by some inch or so, landing a forkful of vegetables fairly upon his chin, to say nothing of the spilling of half a cup of tea on his plate, fondly imagining that it was flowing graciously down his throat.

When supper was over he felt wild enough for the maddest project the human mind might suggest. Had an enterprise been set on foot to remove the mountains, he would have jumped at the task. He experienced that lofty delight, that reckless, do n't-care-for-anything happiness, that uncompromising, invincible, imperturbable gloriousness that only a deep imbiber of ardent spirits can ever realize. Had some "fighting crowd" from another village appeared on the scene and introduced a free fight, how he would have delighted to set himself against ten or fifteen at once. But none were present save the boys of the Weston neighborhood, and they were all friends. The little affair of the watermelon afforded no opportunity for him. Besides, he looked upon that as

merely a little entertainment among themselves. Once he had half a mind to steal away from Weston, walk to Waynesburg that evening yet—as it was only about twenty miles—and undertake the task of lamming all the rowdies of that neighborhood, beginning with Job Welles. This idea, however, he discarded, on the ground that they might hear of his approach and evacuate, and that thus he would have his walk for nothing. No, he would postpone that enterprise.

By and by a more glorious scheme presented itself. Was he ever in a better plight, a more favorable mood—would he ever be again?—to enact the final scene in the programme which he had arranged to avenge his friend Dick? Capital thought!

"Nes Tanton," he muttered to himself, as he walked from Mr. Duffey's porch, (for intoxication was seldom known to retard his locomotion)—"Nes Tanton, you 'r 't rump, you 'r 'oss, you 'r 'tiger! Now 's 'time t'wind 't up. T'day 's th 'day. Now 'r never. G'up t' Ir'ation's, ole boy, n see 'r lady—M's Tilly Tate. Tell 'r 'r' done 'r—'t 'r' don' lov 'r—'t 'r 'n ever did—(hic—ear, 'ear!)—'t 'r 'n' ever 'ill, 't's more o 't. Blas t'r'opes f'rever. Glor's! What'r sayn, Es Tanton? 'Greed, ha? Tha's so. Ver' well. Walk 'll d' ye good. 'Sides, y'r 'oss 'is 't 'ome. 'Taint f'r; n't mor 'n sis mile. C'n walk 't 'n 'n 'our. S' way w' go. C'm 'long, Nes Tanton—(hic, ode 'ear!)—c'm 'long; 's s' day's dute 'fore you. C'm' 'long."

Thus conversing with himself, the inebriate Ned took his way unobserved from the village, and was soon walking alone out the mountain road

When he had traveled three or four miles, the liquor he had drank began to lose its stimulating effect; his hilarity and general elevation of inward feeling melted away, and quite the contrary state of things began to be imminent, including an undue depression of spirits, an uncomfortable sensation in the inner man about twelve inches below the chin, and an unaccountable disposition of trees and other surrounding objects to circumambulate with a strange danc-

ing motion. The result of all this was that Ned spontaneously lay down upon the green-sward at the road-side, with a view to resting for a "few minutes." He did rest awhile, with his eyes shut, and with his ears, in fact, not particularly attentive to such sounds as might be heard in the vicinity. The sun went down; the twilight came and faded; the dusk of the evening hovered over the fields—then darkness; and still the "few minutes" had not quite passed away. The whip-poor-will was heard in the adjacent woods, as also was the hooting owl; the frogs, the crickets, sung their accustomed nocturnal songs, small branches of trees, here and there, rustled slightly, as the wings of the bat fluttered among them; the stars shone out as was their wont—and it was night.

"Where the deuse am I?"

Such was the exclamation of one Edward Stanton as a dull headache aroused him from oblivion, and he found himself lying prone upon his back, and the dew of night resting upon his countenance, while innumerable bright little stars looked reproachfully down upon him from the dark sky above.

"In the name of brandy-and-sugar, where am I?" he repeated, arising to a sitting posture.

He did not know where he was, and there was no one there to tell him. The only response was the scream of an owl in a tree near by, which, at least, convinced him that he was not in bed.

"Whew!" he exclaimed, as a slight recollection of the evening's proceedings dawned upon him. "Whew! what a darned fool I have been! I remember now; I started to visit Miss Tilly Tate, and here I am, half way to the mountain, lying in a fence-corner like a swine, and no knowing what time of night it is. It may be to-morrow morning, for all I know; or, indeed, I may have slept here for twenty-four hours, and this may be to-morrow night. And here I have lain, like a beast of the field, in a drunken sleep, while hours have passed away, while decent men are in their beds, and

lo! the very stars are looking down with unmistakable loathing. Oh, Ned, Ned! drink is a good thing—glorious—if you only use it right; but get to abusing it, and it will turn against you like any dear friend, and bring misery upon you! Oh, dear, I would give twenty dollars, and leave off drinking for three weeks in the bargain, to be in my bed. Will I consummate my errand now? Will I proceed to the mountain and see Tilly? I reckon not. Did she know of this, however she may regard me, I fear she would steal a march on me by informing me that any further attention of mine would be entirely repugnant to her. Well, I must get out o' this and make for home. What if daylight should come before I get there, and I should meet some one of the neighbors just going out to catch a horse, or drive the cows up, or something of that sort, and he should open his eyes and mouth, stare me out of countenance, and say, 'Thunder, Ned! Where you been?' Oh, earth, what could I say? Why nothing—could only stand struck dumb, with nothing to say, and not a word to say it with, which would be something so remarkable for me that I would be taken for mad. Oh, dear, I wonder how wanes the night." And he arose and took his way homeward, experiencing a "blueness" that rivaled the very darkness of the night for gloom.

He had not gone far when a stray thought of mad-dogs entered his head. He had an indistinct recollection that one had been in the village that afternoon, but he failed to remember that George Roland had killed it, and now he began to feel really uneasy at the thought of meeting it. Feeling gloomy as he did, his mind was the very home for such dark thoughts, and, as he walked on, a dread came upon him, and he glanced uneasily to the right and the left, surveying every stump, log and bush with a suspicious eye. There were few things he feared, few forms of death from which he would have shrunk in terror; but a mad-dog was so different from everything else, and, as he thought of the appalling story of the sufferings and death of the little girl who had lately been

a victim to hydrophobia, he might have exclaimed, with Macbeth:

> "What man dare, I dare:
> Approach thou like the rugged Russian bear,
> The arm'd rhinoceros, or the Hyrcan tiger;
> Take any shape but that, and my firm nerves
> Shall never tremble."

With such ruminations Ned walked home rather rapidly; and was just emerging from a little grove of trees, within a few hundred yards of his father's house, when he was somewhat startled by the sudden appearance of a dark object in the road, a few paces in advance. Coming to an abrupt standstill, his consternation was heightened by perceiving that the dark object was approaching him. What could it be but a mad-dog?—the same one that made a raid into the village? With an agility which he had not displayed since he was a boy, Ned sprang aside and climbed a sapling, whose strength was barely sufficient to support his weight, and whose height barely elevated him beyond the reach of a dog. He fondly hoped that the animal would pass on, that he might speedily descend from his irksome perch and repair to his home. But no; the stubborn creature, which Ned now clearly saw was a dog, came straight to the roots of the sapling, and there stopped.

"Get out, you rascal!" shouted Ned.

The reply was a strange kind of whine, which Ned felt sure no sane dog would ever utter.

"Get out, I say! Get out! Begone, you scoundrel, begone! Get away! Go 'long with you!" he shouted, savagely, surging the sapling to and fro, and rattling its branches, in the hope of intimidating the monster.

But as he did so the sapling almost bent to the earth beneath his weight, and he observed with horror that the ferocious beast attempted to seize his coat-tail.

"Get out! Get out!" he shouted again. "Oh, what a predicament for an honest man to be in!"

A low growl and a singular bark were the response of the fiend in canine form.

"Oh, what can I do?" said Ned. "If I only had a club, a brick, half a fence-rail, or some such light weapon, I would soon knock the rascal; but here I am treed, yes, *treed*, with no weapons save my knife and a tooth-pick, and I dare not meet the monster in an encounter so close that I could use them. A single scratch from one of his poisonous teeth, and, although I should afterwards kill him and cut him up into sausage-meat, it would be all up with me. Nay, more than up. The horrible death from hydrophobia—worse than a thousand ordinary deaths—I dare not think of, much less brave. Oh—get out! Go away! Help! Murder! Mad-dogs! Help! Help!"

About this time the dog executed a succession of curious gyrations, among which was his springing against the sapling as though to ascend like a cat, at the same time giving utterance to a low growl or two, that made the wretched Ned shudder. He fondly hoped that some one might hear his voice and come to the rescue; but no succor came; no answering voice was heard in the still night. Poor Ned was left to the mercy of the most terrible of terrible creatures.

"Well," said he, in a tone of calm resignation, "all I can do is to wait till this demon goes away, or till the morning comes. When the day approaches he will surely run away; or, if not, some one will pass along the road whom I can send up to the house to get my gun and shoot him. Very well, I'll be patient. I wish I had just one glass to keep out the dew; and I wish I had something to read to pass the time away."

He must have forgotten that it was rather dark to read when he made this observation.

"Bow-wow!" suddenly barked the dog, making a frantic spring toward the treed man.

Ned imagined that he felt the monster's hot breath on the toe of his boot, it came so near reaching him; and he hastily

gathered up his feet, and compressed his form into the smallest possible space.

"Get out! Go away, you rascal! I'll kill you!" shrieked Ned, daring, in his extremity, to hope that a rabid dog would appreciate such a threat.

The animal did not "get out" nor go away, but remained in that immediate locality, snuffing the air, whining, growling, and, now and then, as Ned thought, eating a stone of a pound or so by way of pastime.

"Oh, that the morning would come!" ejaculated Ned, as the perspiration started from his frame; "how gladly would I hail the break of day, the early dawn, the rising sun! Ha! A new idea! It is customary for men to *get up* in the morning; but when the morning comes, *I* must *get down*. Oh, what a new system of repose! Perched on a slender sapling, with a mad-dog snapping his foaming teeth at your toes and coat-tails! Was mortal man ever before in such a strait? I pause for reply. But patience; I must bide my time. Roll on, weary, weary hours! Hasten, lazy orb of day, and peep above the mountain top; for till then there is no peace, no rest, no security for this unfortunate, benighted, besieged, treed individual!"

Slowly the hours dragged by, the night wore away, and gray glowing streaks, that stretched themselves along the summit of the mountain, announced the approach of day. When the broad light once more revealed the things of earth, with what indescribable emotions did Ned Stanton discover that it was not a mad-dog which had kept him treed during the greater part of the night, but his own faithful, loving dog, Watch! That noble creature, finding, in the course of the night, that his prodigal master had not returned, had started in search; and meeting him as described, and seeing him spring aside and mount a tree, jumped to the conclusion that he was drunk, as usual; and regarded it as a clearly incumbent duty to remain near him till he should become sober. Hence, poor Watch had remained under the sapling

all the while, whining anxiously, and playing uneasily about, hoping every moment to see Ned recover his right mind and descend. The springing up on the part of Watch, which had caused Ned such terror, was merely an effort to make himself known. As for his taking an early breakfast of soft stones, Ned did not *see* that; he merely heard the noise, and imagined the action.

Ned's first impulse, on descending from the sapling, was to procure a "shillalah" and present the dog with a profound "lathering;" but then he remembered that the faithful animal had only done what he supposed to be his duty, and thought better of it. Moreover, Watch manifested such delight when he came down, capering about, and fondling upon him, that he could not find it in his heart even to speak unkindly to him.

"You 're a good, faithful fellow," said he, patting the dog upon the head. "Noble Watch! I have beaten you heretofore, but I will never do so again. Come, let us go home."

Side by side the two walked up the road toward the house, the dog looking satisfied and happy, like one that had done his duty; Ned looking sad and crestfallen, like one that had n't. When they reached home, the folks were not stirring yet, it being Sunday morning. Ned entered quietly through one of the back windows and went to bed; and that day, it was a thing unaccountable to his respected parents, that he slept half a day longer than was his wont.

CHAPTER XXVI.

ANOTHER PLOT.

About the middle of October, Philip Kirke visited the robbers' den. It was a pleasant day, and he and his confederates sat conversing for a long time among the thick foliage that clothed the bluff, and hung, still green with summer's hue, about the mouth of the cave. The frost, with his withering breath, had not yet visited the Monongahela, and the earth and air were more like the earth and air of moderate summer than of autumn. Not a leaf had yet faded, or even changed its color by the slightest tinge; nor did the birds seem fewer now than during the past three months. The sun shone warmly, and a most healthful breeze, kissing the pure fresh water of the river, swept gently the face of the steep declivity.

"After all, Bill," observed Philip, sentimentally, "October is the pleasantest month of the year."

"Well," replied his highly non-romantic lieutenant, "any weather 't 's not too cold or too hot for business is the delightfulest an' gloriousest weather in the world. Them 's my idees."

There was a pause of a few minutes, during which all gazed complacently out upon the surface of the Monongahela.

"Bill," said Philip, "I believe that jug you keep in the cave is inexhaustible."

"Entirely so, captain; will you have a drink?"

"Yes, let us all imbibe."

The jug was brought out, and all drank.

"That 's excellent, Bill," observed Philip; "where did it come from?"

"From old Israel Crow's," was the reply.

"Some of his own distilling, no doubt."

"Yes, sartin. I think we ort to patternize him after this. What d' ye say?"

"I think so, too."

Feeling somewhat elated by the beverage, they sat for several minutes as a man might sit on the verandah of his hotel, enjoying the pure air, and the delightful prospect generally.

"Bill," said Philip, abruptly, "there's a villain in the settlement, whose very presence is like poison to me—or, rather, like some foul vapor in the air I breathe. Should I see him cut down, thrust into the earth, and covered up with the clods, it would be a far happier day to me than my wedding-day can ever be."

"Who is he?" asked Bill.

"A reptile, of whom I have told you before—an envious, meddling, malicious fool—Roland. I hate him, I despise him, I almost fear him. Since the day I had the quarrel with him—the day of the raising, of which I told you—I feel as though I can never live till he is dead—yes, *dead*. I have more than one reason for feeling so."

"What is your reasons? Let 's hear 'em."

"Why, you see, aside from the malignity he displayed that day, he gave me a look which said, as plainly as words: 'Beware, Phil Kirke! I have my eye on you: I 'll watch you.' But for a second thought, I would have shot him."

"It 's well enough you did n't, I s'pose."

"Yes; had I done so, it would have gone hard with me. I had plenty of friends there so long as a square fight was the word; but they would not have borne me out in an act of that kind. I would have been arraigned for murder."

"And hung," suggested Bill, thoughtfully.

"Yes, no doubt."

"D' ye think the feller railly suspicions ye?"

"I half believe he does, though what the cause is I cannot

imagine. He has never seen anything in my deportment which would be ground for suspicion; and yet that look cannot be misunderstood."

"Then, why do n't you fix him some dark night!"

"Why, the fact is, it would be very unsafe for me. Every one knows that we are bitter enemies, and that we would probably kill one another if we dare; and should his body be found some fine morning, lying along the road between his house and the village, with a stab, or a bullet-hole—"

"That 's the style."

"—Why, persons would naturally ask, from mere curiosity, where *I* was during the night. Could I prove that all the night I was at Tony's, suspicion could never point to me; but should it be brought to mind that I was absent an hour or two, it would place me in an awkward position."

"That 's a fact."

"Now, there is another fellow in Weston whom *you* have reason to hate."

"Who is that?" asked Bill, eagerly.

"John Duffey."

"Curse him!" exclaimed Bill, vehemently. "I like him so well I could eat his heart for supper!"

"He has always stood in your way," suggested Philip; "has met you at every turn, to thwart you, during the last year. I think he was born to be your enemy; he is always in your way."

"If I git a chance, I 'll make him stand out o' my way, and every body elses, for ever!"

"That opportunity is within your grasp."

"How? When?"

"To-morrow night he and my particular enemy will be traveling on a lone road together."

"What road?"

"The road between New Market and Weston. To-morrow there is to be a horse-race at New Market, and Duffey and Roland are going. The race is not to come off until the

afternoon, and they will be in the night returning. Do you understand?"

'Don't I?"

"You are, I believe, familiar with all the public roads for miles round?"

"Yes."

"And especially that road?"

"Yes, 'specially."

"Then—there are five of you here—let four of you post yourselves at a favorable point on the road and wait for the two rats, while the fifth remains at home. What do you say?"

"Agreed."

"All willing, boys?"

The other ruffians signified their assent.

"Who 's to stay at home?" asked Joe.

"You may decide that among yourselves."

"Draw cuts," suggested Sam.

"The four 'o you may draw cuts," said Bill; "as for me, I 'm considered one 'o the party, in course."

"Yes," said Philip, "you must go."

"Hur, I have the cuts," said one of the Busters, holding in his hand four twigs. "Who 'll hold 'em?"

"I will," said Philip.

"Whoever gits the shortest will stay at home an' keep house," said Bill.

The lots were drawn, and it fell upon one of the brothers to remain at the cave while the bloody deed should be transacted.

"I 'spose I must 'bide," he remarked; "but I 'd rather 'gage in the fun."

"Has the game any valuables about 'em?" queried Sam.

"Yes," returned Philip, "I think you will find enough on their persons to pay for your trouble. They both carry plenty of money when they go to a place of that kind,—a horse-race,—and they will no doubt carry, besides, handsome

pistols, which I know they possess; of which, by the way, beware."

"We 'll watch 'em," returned Bill.

"If you are discreet, you will incur no risk."

"But 'spose there 'd be more 'n two of 'em? What 'f some others would be with 'em," suggested Sam.

"Why, should that be the case, you will discover it on their approach, and you need not attack them. I am sure, however, that there will be but these two, and from them you have nothing to fear."

"I 'd say not," observed Bill.

"How did you find out they was a goin' ?" asked one of the others.

"I heard them talk of it in the tavern last evening. They asked several others to accompany them, but all refused, on the ground of not having the time to spare. Roland, it seems, has some errand to perform there, so that, by going on the day of the race, he can kill two birds with one stone. As for your man, young Duffey, he has a pretty girl over there whom he is courting, and whom, it is said, he intends to marry: who do you think it is?"

"How 'd I know?"

"Well, it is no other than the daughter of the man whom he and a companion rescued from your hands about a year ago, on the New Market and Brownsville road."

"Whew!—is it possible?"

"Yes, so I have been told."

"An' that's what started the love, I 'spect. Wery well. Ha! ha! In love! Oh, bless his young heart!"

"Yes," returned Philip, smiling, "in love."

"Oh, the young cuss," said Bill, grinding his teeth, "I 'll cut his love dreams short! Wont I pay him for the blow he gave me over the head a month or two ago! and wont I pay him for what he done about a year ago! and—"

"Fur shootin' at us when we was peaceably follerin' our lawful an' rightful business," put in Sam.

"An' thereby willfully causin' the loss of our hats, an files an' other harmless things," suggested Joe.

"Yes, we 'll pay him up for all. A big debt, but we 'll pay it," said Bill, who seemed to be honestly inclined with regard to *that* business transaction.

"Whatever you do," enjoined Philip, "do n't let *Rolano* escape. He is the bane of my life. He must *die*."

"Never fear," returned Bill. "He 'll die, an' so will t' other. But what must we do with 'em?"

"I think you may safely leave them lie where you kill them. In fact, there is no reason why further trouble should be had with them; they are not worth it. One thing is certain, the people will never suspect me for it, and they can never *find you*."

"That 's certain. They will be apt to have a fine hunt all over Greene county for the murderers," chuckled Bill; "but we 'll be keerful to stay at home for a while arter. They wont think 'o lookin' on this side 'o the river."

"So you must. I will visit you cautiously, and bring you the news in a day or two. By the way, I am going to Pittsburg, in a week or ten days, with a load of grain, and if there is anything you need which I can get you there I will get it. However, I will be here again before I go, and you can then tell me what you want, if anything."

"Wery well. When you come agin I will give you a inventory of some useful things I need for the carryin' on 'o business,—some articles to make up for what we lost in Weston last May. Are you goin' to take a keel boat down the river?"

'No; one or two flat-boats will carry the grain I have."

"How much have you?"

"By the time I am ready to go I will have more than two thousand bushels. I 'll make about six hundred dollars on it. I made three hundred on what I took down a week ago. My expenses are very light. I hire three or four men to push the boats down and back, and them I pay only ten dollars a piece."

"You 're a enterprisin' member 'o the firm," observed Bill, in a complimentary tone.

After some further discussion of trivial matters, Philip took his leave.

"Remember to-morrow night, and make sure work of it: let neither of the two ever see another sun," was his parting injunction.

"It 'll be done to-night," was the reply.

Philip climbed to the top of the bluff, and struck off through the woods toward the main road.

He was now a plotting murderer. Observe how he had grown in vice and crime. He had now become far more hardened and unscrupulous than when we first made his acquaintance. He was then an accidental murderer; now he was a willful and deliberate one. He had not hastily taken this step. He had considered long first. But, finally, both to satisfy revengeful feelings, and promote his own security, he had decided to make use of his willing tools to rid himself of a hated and probably dangerous enemy. And in order to secure most unreservedly the services of his confederate, Bill, he had willingly agreed to sacrifice, with that enemy, a young man who had never harmed him, never crossed him, never threatened him by word or look. But we shall soon see how that, to avert a new threatening danger from himself, he went to a still greater length.

When he reached the public road, a figure of a man—the very same that crouched in the bushes on the night of the graveyard affair a year before—might have been seen standing in the midst of a cluster of saplings that grew near the road. Philip was busy with his dark thoughts, and did not see it; but it saw him—did that mysterious figure. It watched him so long as he was within sight; and it thought strange that Philip had come so far for a ramble. By and by, it plunged into the deep woods, and wandered strangely about, "as if in quest of something," during the whole of the remaining day.

CHAPTER XXVII.

AN EVENTFUL DAY.

"HA! ha! Good for the little bay horse! I'll bet a new hat on the bay, if you dare!" exclaimed John Duffey, as the two swift horses went flying round the race-course.

"Done!" retorted George Roland. "A new hat on the black! Hurrah for the black! See how he spreads himself!"

"No, the bay will win; for see how he stretches himself!" persisted John Duffey. "Hurrah for the bay! Hurrah!"

Away sped the nimble horses around the prescribed ring, side by side,—their riders scarcely daring to breathe for fear of retarding their motion. In three successive courses round the wide ring were the horses to test their moving qualities. Heavy wagers were laid on the result, and each rider was determined his animal should win.

"Once around, and black ahead!" shouted George Roland, as the two horses swept past the stand.

"The bay will make it up before they go round again," Duffey returned. "Only half a tail's length behind, and gaining!"

Away they went flying around the beaten track like mad, and in a few minutes again shot past the stand—perfectly abreast.

"Even!" was shouted on all sides. "Even! Not a hair's difference! Hurrah for the third round!"

"The black will win," said George.

"No, the bay! Hurrah for the bay and a new hat!"

Another round, and, the horses, with main and tail flowing wildly in the wind, their eyes and nostrils distended, and

every muscle strained, reached the stand for the last time — the bay a few feet in advance.

"Hurrah for the bay!" shouted a multitude of voices. "Hurrah! Hurrah!"

"Good for the bay!" said Duffey.

"You 've won the hat," remarked George: "shall it be a black one?"

"No, a bay one," returned John.

A great concourse of people thronged the vicinity of the race-course, and for a time the noise and confusion were almost intolerable. Here and there were heard shouts of merriment, or loud altercations; to add to the general interest of the occasion, a few innocent personal encounters were improvised.

"Now, I just wonder if Job Welles do n't happen to be here to-day," John Duffey abruptly observed, as the thought for the first time occurred to him.

"The fellow who had your horse last fall?"

"Yes."

No doubt he is. He is usually present on such occasions, I am told, when within any reasonable distance."

"Well, this cannot be more than a dozen miles from where he lives; he would not allow that distance to prevent his seeing a famous horse-race."

"No, indeed: he is here, you may depend."

"And should we meet him, he will recognize me, and I may make up my mind to catch it."

"Not all yourself. I hope I may be allowed to sustain a portion of the ills in store."

"No, if we meet him, you must not interfere; it would only make it worse for both of us; for no doubt he will have his crowd with him."

"I scarcely think I should stand quietly by and see you mauled out of your boots," returned George.

Thus conversing, our Weston friends were strolling leisurely

around the race-course, when they were abruptly confronted by the redoubtable Job Welles and half a dozen of his party.

"Ha! ha! How do you do?" exclaimed Job, with a demoniac grin on his countenance, and an exultant glance of his evil eye. "I believe I have the pleasure o' yer acquaintance."

"I really hope so; for you are such a good-looking man that I would be proud to number you among my most intimate friends. I may, at least, presume to take the liberty of hoping that you are quite well."

"Quite well, thank you—specially my hand, which I got hurt, a year or two ago, by the merest accident. It has now got very well again—better 'n ever, in fact," returned Job, in a significant tone.

"I presume that your general health is good," coolly observed John, pretending not to notice the insinuation.

"Oh! elegant," returned Job, almost with enthusiasm. "I don't think I have felt so well as I do now since I got over the measles."

The ruffians who accompanied Job now chuckled, and winked at each other, in a very becoming style. George Roland, who knew at a glance who Job was, stood quietly by, listening to the decorous confab.

"I am truly glad to hear it," returned the imperturbable Duffey; "I cannot imagine anything that would give me so much pain as to learn at any time you were very ill—lying at the point of death, for instance."

"I allus knowed that," returned Job; "an' I try to preserve my health, an' take the bulliest care o' myself, jist on your account."

"I appreciate your noble, magnanimous, and self-denying spirit, and do hereby take the greatest pleasure in bidding you a good afternoon," said Duffey, as he and George made a move to pass on.

"'Xcuse me, my good feller," said Job; "but, to tell the truth, I think too much of you to part with you so soon. I

know you won't think hard o' me if I keep you here jist a few minutes."

Job's admiring followers now chuckled, winked at each other, and looked very happy.

"A few minutes," returned Duffey. "Exactly. Merely till you settle that little horse affair with me. That is what you mean, Job Welles. Now, go to work, as soon as you please. I am perfectly willing to assist you."

"Well, it 'll be settled now, in a darned short time," said Job, deliberately proceeding to doff his coat.

By this time the attention of outsiders had been attracted, and the group was fast swelling into a throng.

"Well, sir, the play could not well proceed without me, as I have an important part to act," observed Duffey, coolly casting aside his own superfluous raiment.

"Hold on, Duffey," said George Roland. "You are not large enough to fight that big ruffian; and he is a coward to attempt to bully you. Stand aside, and, if he wants a fight, I am his man."

"Oh!" sneered a brutal-looking fellow of Job's crowd, "you kin have a fight, too, if you want it. Yes, an' a dozen more sich fellers as you."

"All Weston, if they was here," added another.

"You cowardly dogs!" exclaimed George, advancing, "you well know that we two are the only Weston men here to-day, and you think to set on us with the odds in your favor. Come on; I can lick the whole thieving gang of you!"

"Never mind," urged Duffey, "there is no use raising a regular riot. This fellow, Welles, wants to fight me. Let him come on; I will give him satisfaction." And John confronted the stout ruffian.

"No, you must not," said George, drawing his friend back. "Job Welles, will you fight me?"

"Curse you! To the—"

"What 's all this about?" interrupted a stentorian voice among the crowd. "Who wants to fight? I 'm on hand!

Hilloa! my old friend Job Welles! Ha! ha! Joby, may be you would like to try on me again what you tried in Weston once. Here I am, cut and dried, smoked and laid up on a shelf for you." And Ned Stanton, accompanied by Will Hempstead, plunged through the crowd, and confronted the burly form of Job Welles."

"What! You here, Ned!" exclaimed Duffey and Roland, in a breath.

"Yes, we heard you had come over; and thinking you might meet this scape-gallows and his crowd of thieves, we came over to see that they do n't eat you up, without proper preliminaries. By thunder, Welles is as ugly as ever. I do n't believe that pounding I gave him improved his looks."

Welles turned pale, at Ned's first appearance, and soon became actually ill at ease; while those with him lost all the quiet complacency which they seemed to enjoy a few moments before.

"Oh, you darned cowardly villain!" Ned went on, addressing his remarks to Job. "You and your contemptible gang thought you had a couple of Weston boys just where you could salt and pepper 'em to your satisfaction. Now, curse you, come on. Not one, but all of you—all at once. I can whip the whole crowd in two minutes, and I am going to do it." And Ned, with the back of his hand, dealt Job Welles a stinging blow upon the mouth.

Mad with rage, yet not daring to risk a fair personal encounter with his old enemy, Job drew a pistol, and was on the point of leveling it upon Ned, when the latter quickly gave him another blow, near the temple, with his closed fist, felling him senseless to the ground. Then, without a moment's hesitation, he rushed among those whom he perceived were Job's backers, knocking them right and left. All who were not knocked down scampered off in terror; while those who had fallen beneath Ned's powerful fist, staggered to their feet as soon as possible, and slunk away.

"Hurrah for Stanton! Three cheers for Weston!" shouted the bystanders.

Shouts, jeers, and bursts of laughter followed the defeated and retreating rowdies.

The insensible form of the bully-in-chief was carried from the scene by philanthropic conservatives; and, finally, after having a barrel or two of water poured on him promiscuously, he recovered his consciousness. So soon as his condition allowed, he mounted his horse and rode home.

The Weston boys repaired to the village tavern, where they were fairly lionized by the populace. In that sparsely settled region, everybody knew everybody within the scope of many miles; and, while Ned Stanton was famous in New Market for his verbosity and general vivacity; and John Duffey, for his mischievous pranks; Job Welles was equally notorious, as a rough, overbearing, quarrelsome and unscrupulous character. As our young friends from Weston had executed their chief errands, prior to the race, there was now nothing to do but make merry for a while with their numerous friends at the tavern, and return home at their leisure.

About sunset, feeling all the happier for a drink or two, they mounted their horses, and rode homeward. The evening was clear, and not long after the sun had gone down, the full moon peeped timidly from behind the distant mountains, and the settlement was bathed in her silvery light.

"It was a lucky thing you came to New Market to-day, Ned," remarked John Duffey; "you came just in time."

"If I had known you were going, I would have gone with you in the first place. About eleven o'clock to-day Will and I happened to meet at Tony's, and we were told there that you had gone. We knew that you would meet with Welles and get into trouble, so we quickly went home for our horses, which we did not happen to have with us, and, returning to Weston, crossed the river, and came here at a swift pace. We left our horses at the tavern, learned there that Welles, and about a dozen rowdies from Waynesburg, were there, and

we hurried out to the race-course. We saw a crowd gathered together, and, not doubting there was a row on hand, we went up, and found you and Job about ready to go at it. But, did n't they scatter, though? Oh! I wish they had all stood their ground; it would have been fun to lick 'em all?"

"They could n't well stand their ground, when you knocked them down so fast," observed Duffey.

"They 'll not come back to New Market again for a year," remarked George Roland.

Merrily chatting, they rode on over the smooth road at a smart pace, till within four or five miles of Weston, when the conversation turned on the speed of their horses.

"Why," said Ned, who was mounted on a large, powerful, though not swift, animal, "I could leave you all a mile behind, in ten minutes."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed John Duffey; "I could outrun that big horse of yours on foot."

"Better try it mounted first. Even that fast pony you have under you could n't do that."

"I have a piece of horse-flesh here," put in George Roland, "that will leave you all behind."

"All but this one of mine," suggested Will.

"No, I 'll not except any."

"Well," said Ned, "the night is beautiful, and the road smooth—what say you to a race?"

"I 'm in," replied George. "What distance?"

"From here to that woods a mile ahead."

"Good. What say you, John?"

"Agreed."

"The hindmost man to treat the company, when we get to Weston," Ned suggested.

"By all means," acquiesced Will.

"Very well: a fair start. All ready?"

"Yes."

"Then, one, two, three, away!"

Off the four steeds darted, the clatter of their hoofs mak-

ing the earth tremble. Duffey and Will soon swept ahead of the others; and when they arrived at the wood Ned and George were several hundred yards behind.

"*We* are about even. Where are George and Ned?" said John.

"Away back under the hill yet. I don't believe they tried to keep up. Let us ride slowly through the wood, and they will soon overtake us." And they rode forward among the timber.

Suddenly the bushes at the roadside, a few paces ahead of them, were heard to rustle, and two dark forms sprang out upon the road.

"Robbers!" exclaimed John, clubbing his riding-whip; while Will quickly drew a pistol, and cocked it.

"Stand aside, whoever you are!" Will called out.

"Or we'll make you," John added.

The moment John spoke, one of the ruffians leveled a pistol, evidently at him, and fired, the ball passing a few feet over his head. Will fired in return, and both dashed forward. He that had fired the pistol—no other than Bill of the cave—seized Duffey's bridle-rein, while the other resolutely grasped that of Will. Knives could be seen gleaming in their hands, as streaks of moonlight shone upon them, through crevices in the foliage, and the young men knew that the moment was a perilous one. With a blow of his riding-whip, John almost crushed the hand of Bill, causing him most unceremoniously to relax his grasp of the bridle-rein; but, at the same instant, he received a blow from behind, that almost sent him from his horse. A like assault was made on Will, but with trivial result; and before another blow could be struck, Ned and George dashed up, and felled the two new assailants to the earth—Ned with his fist, and George with a loaded riding-whip. One of the two scrambled up, and, with the two in front, ran away into the woods; but the other—the one whom Ned had struck down—lay perfectly motionless upon the road.

"Oh the villains!" exclaimed John.

"What is it all about?" asked Ned. "Who are they? Surely, not the men we met to-day."

"No, I think they are highwaymen," returned John. "There were four or five of them. Two caught our horses, while others struck at us from behind with clubs. But for your timely aid they would have finished us. Ah, Ned, that is the second good turn you have done for me to-day! I can never forget you for it!"

"I think I have finished one of them," Ned remarked, dismounting.

The whole party dismounted, and soon ascertained that Ned's victim was unconscious. A pistol and several knives were found lying in the road.

"It is too bad," remarked Ned, "that we did not get the others. Let us go in search of them."

"That would be useless," said George; "they are far away by this time. Besides, we could not leave our horses."

"Very true," concurred Will. "But what will we do with this fellow?"

"I think I will test the virtue of one of their own dirks on his carcass, so that he, at least, will never participate in a repetition of the attempt they have made to-night," said Ned.

"No, let us carry him to Weston."

"And allow him to escape as the other did last fall," retorted Ned.

"But we wont let him escape," observed John. "When we get him there, we will restore him to his senses, and he may reveal something. After that, we will hang him up without much ado."

"Very well; hand him up to me, and I will carry him," said Ned, remounting.

While John held the horses, George and Will lifted the insensible form of the robber to the back of Ned's horse.

Ned grasped him firmly, the others mounted, and all rode from the wood.

"The others may intercept us, and attempt a rescue," remarked Will.

"I hope they may," Ned replied. "We will then have an opportunity of taking them all. But there is no likelihood that they will trouble us again to-night. Oh, I would give—Ah, you sneaking, murdering villain! You'll groan worse than that before morning!" he broke off, as the wounded robber emitted a groan.

When they reached Weston, which they did between ten and eleven, the captive had recovered his consciousness, and was laboring under the liveliest apprehension of the fate that awaited him.

Philip Kirke, after seeing George Roland and John Duffey depart for New Market that morning, visited the cave, and reported to Bill and the others that the intended victims had gone on their journey, and that no others had accompanied them. Returning to the road, he visited Mr. Patton, of whom he had purchased grain once or twice, and there remained till after dinner, departing for Weston at two. He was far from feeling perfectly at ease during the day, although he could not imagine how the impending murders could possibly endanger him. When he arrived at the village, having walked very leisurely after leaving the farmer's house, the evening was approaching, and he found himself actually in a state of trepidation. A drink or two of brandy, however, restored his nerves to their wonted quiet, and he viewed more calmly the projected crimes. It was not until a late hour of the evening that Tony casually informed him that Ned Stanton and Will Hempstead had gone to New Market a couple of hours later than the others. This intelligence somewhat startled Philip, coming, as it did, too late to serve him. Had he learned of the fact immediately on his return to the village, he might have been able to reach the cave ere

Bill and his party had started for their place of ambush, but it was too late now.

The villagers were soon aroused and assembled in front of the tavern, upon the arrival of the adventurers and their prisoner; and a scene followed very similar to that enacted in the village more than a year before, when Bill was a chief character. Bill was not the unfortunate party this time; it was one of the Busters. The indignant citizens were determined he should not escape them as Bill had done, and after endeavoring, in vain, to wring from him any disclosures regarding his associates, due preparations were made for hanging him to the sign-post.

When the wretched criminal saw the rope, and fully realized that speedy death stared him in the face, he struggled desperately to disengage himself. Finding his struggles futile, he fell upon his knees, and cried out in a supplicating tone:

"Oh, don't hang me! Don't kill me to-night! Let me live till to-morrow! Let me live an hour!"

"String him up," cried several.

"Or shoot him and be done with it," added another.

"Oh, don't!" screamed the terrified wretch. "Have mercy! Let me live a few minutes,—a minute,—and I'll tell you how,—I ll tell you all about—"

"Down with the rascal!" cried Philip Kirke, at this moment, forcing his way into the immediate presence of the captive. "Oh, the villain!—The very one that robbed me near Pittsburg two or three years ago! I'd know him a thousand years after! Oh, you knave! I told you we would meet again!" And, ere anyone could divine his purpose, Philip drew a pistol from his pocket, raised it and fired, and the luckless robber fell to the earth—a bullet buried in his heart, his tongue silenced, and his lips sealed forever.

A second after, Philip observed that a pair of eyes were regarding him strangely from among the crowd, and he felt an involuntary shudder pass over him.

Great excitement prevailed, and the assembled citizens gathered around the lifeless robber. A few drops of blood were oozing sluggishly from the wound in the breast, and the limbs quivered slightly. The face wore the death hue, and the pulse had ceased to beat, plainly showing that life was extinct.

"Who shot him?" asked several.

"Phil Kirke," was the reply.

"Good for him! That 's right! He has put one rascal out of the way for us."

All expressed their approbation of the deed Philip had done, which did not much alleviate a certain pang he suffered in the consciousness of having slain a comrade.

The dead body was searched, and a few trifling articles found in the pockets, among which was a small pocket knife, with an ivory handle, on which was cut the name, P. KIRKE.

"Why, Phil," exclaimed one, "here is a knife with your name on! He must have taken it from you when he robbed you."

"Yes," returned Philip, "he knocked me almost senseless with a club, and rifled my pockets of everything. I remember that knife well."

The finder restored the knife to Philip, who, as he received it, saw that same pair of eyes fixed searchingly upon him.

The dead body was disposed of with very little ceremony, being next day buried by the citizens in a wood a little way from the village. No coroner's jury sat upon it, nor did the authorities ever investigate the affair. Philip was not called to answer in the slightest degree for what all regarded as a perfectly justifiable and even meritorious act, none imagining that he had killed one of his friends and confederates.

"There is honor among thieves," it is said; but that honor, if it may be so styled, consists merely in mutual interest. Let self-interest become greater, and they are generally ready to cut each other's throats—as the case in question fairly illustrates.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AN OATH.

HAVING seen his victim buried, Philip Kirke cautiously departed for a visit to the cave. He found his remaining four accomplices in a state of great anxiety, especially the remaining Buster. Hardened as Philip was in crime, he almost shrunk from the task of breaking to the bereaved the news of his brother's death; for he knew that the Busters, criminals though they were, had ever entertained for each other even more than the ordinary attachment. It was not, by any means, his intention to tell the whole truth regarding the death of the robber; for should the surviving brother know that it was he who had done the deed, even his rank of commander-in-chief of the den would scarcely save him from summary vengeance.

Bill, with Sam and Joe, had returned to the scene of the melee early that morning, in the hope of obtaining some clue to the fate of their missing companion. They had searched the whole neighborhood, without finding any traces of him; and the result of their investigations was to convince them that he had been disabled, and carried to Weston. It was therefore with the utmost solicitude that they hailed the approach of Philip.

"What's the news? How about Buster?" Bill asked.

"I'll tell you by and by," Philip replied.

"Oh, what's become o' him?" Buster entreated.

"Be quiet now, Buster," said Philip, "and don't carry on like a fool. I have bad news to tell you."

"What is it?" Bill asked.

"I half dread to tell you."

"But I want to know the worst," insisted Buster. 'What's the use o' keepin' a feller not knowin' what to think?"

"Well, you have reason to fear—"

"What? Is he still alive? Do they hold him prisoner? I'll go an' take him away! I'll swear—"

"Pooh! don't get so excited. Be a man. If you don't calm yourself I wont tell you at all," said Philip.

"But I will be quiet! Oh, go on an' tell me!" exclaimed Buster, trembling with agitation.

"But see how excited you are now."

"Well, go on," said Buster, "go on, and tell me the worst. I'm ready for it."

"Then you may prepare to hear the worst."

"Oh, I knowed it! I knowed it! My brother's dead! They've killed him!"

"Your brother *is* dead," returned Philip.

"Dead, dead, dead! Oh! oh!" ejaculated Buster, half cursing, half crying, "killed! I knowed it. Who was it done it? Tell me that!"

"Control yourself, and I'll tell you in time."

"There's a chance for revenge yit," suggested Bill.

"I 'spose the Weston fellers murdered him," ventured Joe, "as they come purty near fixin' you, Bill."

"How was he killed?" Buster asked, in a tone of resignation.

"I 'spose," said Bill, "them fellers as pitched into us done it."

"Not right there then, fur we was there afterwards," said Joe.

"No, they carried him to Weston," rejoined Philip.

"And murdered him there?" asked Buster.

"Yes, in cold blood," returned Philip.

"How?" asked Buster, manifesting a desire to learn all the particulars.

"Hung him, I 'spose," ventured Bill.

"Oh, I hope not," said the brother.

"Why," said Bill, "that's as decent a way—

"Hush, Bill," interrupted Philip. "I'll tell you all about it if you give me time. He was shot."

"An' killed dead?" queried Buster.

"Yes, dead."

"Did n't speak any more?"

"Not a word."

"Who done it? Oh, tell me that!" Buster ejaculated. "Tell me that! Give me his name! Tell me what he's like, so I'll know him! an' oh, I'll pay him! He sha n't live to—"

"Kill any more o' us," interrupted Bill.

"No," Buster went on, "I'll kill him before—"

"Come now, Buster," Philip interrupted, "I thought you were to keep cool. I do n't wish to excite you."

"Excite me, an' my brother killed! Who would n't be excited? I want to know who done it! Tell me, or I'll go to Weston myself an' find out."

"I will tell you; only promise me you will take my advice as to how you proceed," said Philip.

"I will—if you only do n't ask me to spare his life! Who is it? Tell me!"

"You may have your revenge to the fullest extent," responded Philip; "but for the sake of your own safety, as well as for certain purposes of my own, I ask you not to hasten. Will you promise that?"

"Yes. Tell me where I kin find him—"

"And *when?*"

"Yes, when. I'll take your advice."

"And you promise to await the proper time, and not allow your feelings to lead you to rashness?"

"Yes, I'll promise all o' that."

"Then listen to me, and I will tell you all. Your brother was knocked down senseless in the road, and captured by a party of Weston men, who went to New Market yesterday,

after I had left the village to visit you, and I did not, therefore, know that they had gone. They chanced to be behind the two men you attacked, and they rode up at the very worst moment, as you are aware."

"An' knocked him breathless?"

"Yes, and carried him to the village."

"Did he come to?"

"Yes, by the time they arrived at Weston he had recovered his consciousness. A crowd soon gathered around him, and endeavored, by threats, to force him to tell where the rest of his friends stayed, and—"

"He would n't!"

"No; he was firm and brave to the last."

"Jist like him."

"So, finding that he would disclose nothing," Philip continued, "they resolved to hang him at once."

"Oh, if I 'd 'a' only been there!"

"My first impulse," Philip went on, "was to rush upon the crowd and attempt to rescue him; but—"

"Oh, I 'd 'a' done it!" interrupted Buster.

"An' both been slaughtered," suggested Bill.

"Yes," said Philip; "a second thought convinced me that such an attempt would have been madness. So, I spoke to the crowd, and urged them not to take such a rash step. I told them to wait till morning, and then hand him over to the civil authorities. Had they done so, we might have rescued him. They listened to me, and the majority were in favor of taking my advice, when up stepped a fellow, determined not to give him a chance for his life, and shot him dead."

"Oh, the infernal—I 'll kill him! I 'll— But who was it? How will I know him?" said Buster.

"I will tell you. But remember your promise."

"I will."

"Well, it was that fellow we all have reason to hate for his efforts to hunt us to the earth—*Roland*."

"Oh, him!"

"The same."

"Then tell me when I may be revenged!"

"Well, as I told you before, he is at the head of a company organized to hunt us to death."

"Yes."

"But there is nothing to fear from him or his party so long as you all keep close, as they believe that our place is in Greene county. They have scoured this county till they are satisfied our rendezvous is beyond the river; and, unless they see some chance trace of you, they will probably never search on this side again."

"But how—" began Buster; "when—"

"Listen. Now, what you want is revenge. You want to make your brother's murderer suffer as much as possible."

"Yes."

"Well, as I have before told you all, I am going to marry the girl he loves. Now should he live to see that take place—to see me, whom he so hates, in the arms of one he loves, would he not suffer?"

"So he would."

"Then don't you think you had better let him live to see it?"

"I think so; and after that—"

"After that, when he is just beginning to forget it, and to enjoy life again—cut him off."

"That I will! But how long—"

"Before a year, I assure you."

"And how shall I know him when I find him?"

"Oh, I can arrange that when the time comes."

"So you kin. An' it 's that feller, Roland?"

"Yes, the same."

"Curse him!" vociferated Buster, almost frantically. "I swear by all that 's of heaven or hell that I will be revenged. May my soul be eternally shut up in scorchin' fire an' brimstone if I don't kill my brother's murderer!"

Philip shuddered as he heard this; for he felt that if this oath be fulfilled, the consequences to himself would be rather alarming. But pshaw! What was there to fear? By what means could Buster ever discover that it was he, and not George Roland, who had shot his brother? No one in Weston had intercourse with the cave.

There was a pause, during which the bereaved robber threw himself down upon the hard dry floor of the cave in a paroxysm of grief.

"Come," urged Philip, "do n't give way thus. Be a man, and nerve yourself to execute your revenge."

"Oh, I 'll be ready for that," returned Buster, rising. "But tell me, what was done with the body?"

"At my instigation," Philip replied, "the body was decently buried in a little grove along the river."

"Where it may be found?"

"Yes, easily. But I now wish to impress on you all the importance of remaining for some time in the strictest seclusion. Do not leave the cave this fall. Should one of you be seen in the settlement, it would be pretty sure to lead to discovery; and Roland and his party would be down on you some fine morning, ready to shoot you as they would panthers. So long as you do not stir, they will never come here to look for you. Greene county will be thoroughly scoured, and the blood-thirsty fools will return to the village as they went forth. Bill, I know I can depend on you, and on all of you, in fact, to remember my instructions."

"Never fear," Bill returned; "we 'll stay close enough till all danger has blowed over."

"That 's right. I would suggest that you even haul the boat ashore and conceal it."

"We 'll do it."

"Have you plenty of provisions?"

"Yes; we could do with what we have all winter."

"Then there is no reason why you should go far from the cave. You cannot be too cautious. Even when you go out

for wood or water, let it be in the night. There is something else I must mention. As it would be incurring new risk for me to visit you often for a while now, do not think it strange if you do not see me for a month or more. I am going to Pittsburg next week; but, as I think it best not to revisit you soon, I will not get the instruments we spoke about yesterday, as I would not like to keep them about me."

"Very well; we 'll not need 'em this winter."

"I will be in Pittsburg often, though, and will get them yet in time for next summer's operations. So, remember, do nothing till next spring, either here or in Greene county. Let the people suppose that you have gone from the neighborhood; then, next spring, when they least expect it, you can light down on them—"

"Like a night-hawk on a June-bug," Bill suggested.

"Yes, and you might commence your operations by getting rid of our particular enemies."

"But *I'm* to finish that Roland," said Buster.

"Yes, you may have that task; you deserve it."

"An' I," said Bill, "must tend to my man Duffey. I owe him more 'n ever now; he nearly broke my hand last night. I knowed his voice; an' if that cursed pistol o' mine had done its duty, he 'd a never bothered anybody agin."

"Yes, all can be settled in the spring; but that everything may be the more surely done, remain quiet during the fall and winter. Should you run short of provisions, go far beyond this settlement after a supply."

"We wont be apt to ventur about Weston."

"Well, good-by. Remember my instructions, and keep everything straight till you see me again." And Philip took leave of his brother robbers, and returned to the village.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A LAPSE.

DURING the pleasant days of Indian summer, Philip Kirke visited the homestead of Ira Tate, and found, to his satisfaction, that his reputation had not at all suffered there in consequence of his shooting the robber, and that Mary's affection for him was rather enhanced than otherwise; and when he related, from his fertile imagination, a most thrilling story of his having been, at one time, waylaid, robbed and cruelly maltreated by the outlaw whom he had killed in Weston, Ira warmly commended him for his summary act of retribution, stating that—"By gorry! the rascal ought to 'a' been killed a inch at a time."

The same afternoon Philip, Mary and Tilly visited the White Rocks, where they encountered Molly Pry, the fortune-teller, who, to their wonder, ran off like a frightened deer on their approach. After a pleasant chat of an hour, and a survey of the surrounding country, they leisurely descended the mountain, and he returned to the village, fully satisfied with himself and the world—with one exception.

Several times during the autumn Philip visited Pittsburg, but nothing worthy of note occurred. Still esteemed and unsuspected, did this treacherous robber dwell in the midst of the community which he continually betrayed into the hands of his vile associates.

There was one annoying enemy, of whom he had now almost rid himself. That enemy—the tormentor for a time of all bad men—was conscience. But faintly now did conscience ever remonstrate with him; and when she did, her

desponding voice was quickly hushed. Gradually he had come to this. But by degrees had he arrived at a stage of moral darkness when he could congratulate himself that conscience was about dead. And yet he was regarded by those of the village and surrounding neighborhood as a moral young man, and certainly as an honorable gentleman—was even betrothed to the most beautiful girl of the settlement. A few years previously he had been in reality what he appeared to be now—a moral young man, and as far from crime as any ordinary person. But killing a neighbor in a duel—himself the challenger and the provoker of the quarrel—he fled from justice; and considering himself thenceforth the enemy of justice, he proceeded to outrage all her laws. Plunging into forgery and robbery, he soon became a murderer; and once a murderer, and considering himself irretrievably lost, he proceeded to reconcile himself to circumstances; and to make the best of a bad bargain, he decided to silence conscience, and to enjoy the present life, if possible, at whatever cost to others. He had killed his neighbor in Ohio; he had killed honest old Henry White, the father of the unfortunate maiden whom he had led to set her heart and life upon him; and he had killed one of his confederates to secure his own safety. He was, indeed, true to none and to nothing but the devil.

Not long after the capture and death of the hapless Buster, George Roland and his fraternity made an extensive tour through Greene county, in search of the rendezvous of the robbers, penetrating to every secluded nook and valley, and scouring every quiet grove and forest for miles around. More than a week was occupied in the search; but, of course, to no purpose. The party returned to the village, without having discovered a single trace of the outlaws.

Again the people were led to believe that the robbers had evacuated the neighborhood: and, as the fall and winter wore away with no intimation of their presence, that belief amounted

to conviction. They little divined the startling tragedy which the presence of the robbers was destined yet to occasion!

The winter was an unprecedentedly mild one. During the three winter months the snow did not fall to the depth *in toto* of one inch, nor ice freeze to the thickness of ordinary window-glass. The days were usually clear and pleasant, and the nights barely frosty. There was not much rain to render the earth soft, nor frost to make it hard; and the farmers found it easy to do their ploughing for the summer crops. The enjoyments of the winter consisted of a social party, or two, sleighing-parties being, of course, out of the question.

The sage weather-prophets, who, from day to day, foretold a speedy snowstorm, were set entirely at naught by the continued clemency of the winter. When December had passed away, with only a light frost or two, all who were in the habit of taking particular note of the weather (which included all the old farmers in the country) confidently predicted that the months of January and February would necessarily be very severe; but when the month of January had also passed mildly by, it was almost universally agreed that February would certainly bring frosts, snows, chilling winds, and other appurtenances of winter, capable of astonishing even a Greenlander.

But February and March, too, were shoved quietly from the table of time, with only such a faint skim of snow, and such a gentle frost or two, that the weather-prophets were fain to conclude that old winter was either dead or very sound asleep. He was asleep, and these very same barometic prognosticators were destined to witness his inopportune waking up. But, anon.

One important event claims a place in this chapter.

On a clear, bright morning in January, while a light frost, scarcely less gentle than the summer dew, was disappearing before the early sun, and falling in sparkling drops from the bare twigs of the trees, John Duffey, attired in his "best," and mounted upon his spirited pony, crossed the river at Weston, and took his way toward New Market; no doubt having

business, of some sort, to transact in that vicinity. It was about ten o'clock when he arrived at Mr. Ross's gate, and he concluded to stop "for a minute or two." His horse was put away, and himself conducted by Mr. Ross into the little parlor, where Mrs. Ross soon greeted him. He did not see Maggie, and he wondered where she was. In the hope of gaining some light on this absorbing question, he remarked to Mr. and Mrs. Ross, jointly, that he hoped they were "*all* quite well."

"Quite well," was the reply. "Maggie"—John perceptibly started—"has gone out for a little walk—the weather being so pleasant—"

"It is—*very*," John put in, in order to appear not to take undue interest in Maggie.

"She will soon return," said Mrs. Ross.

John was glad to hear that, but didn't confide the sentiment to the parents of the young lady.

After some general conversation, Mr. Ross excused himself; stating that he was constrained to visit his store, having some important business to transact, and begging his young visitor to make himself perfectly comfortable till he should return. John promised to do so—and he felt confident of his ability to fulfill his promise, if Maggie should come soon—and Mr. Ross departed. Mrs. Ross, after a little further conversation, was compelled to leave Duffey alone for a while, in order to make preliminary arrangements for dinner.

"Maggie will soon return," said she, on withdrawing; "meantime, there are books," pointing to a book-case of literature; "amuse yourself by looking over them; and pray excuse my seeming inattention."

"Oh, don't mention it!" said John.

When he found himself alone, he proceeded to make an invasion among the books, and seeing a volume of Shakspeare, and knowing that that work contained many beautiful sentiments which might be in sympathy with his frame of mind, (his

thoughts dwelling chiefly on Miss Maggie,) he eagerly seized it, and sat down to con it over.

"Poets generally," he mused, as he turned over the leaves in a desultory manner, "are very profuse in their encomiums on the fair sex, and I believe Shakspeare is no exception. Some insipid creatures pronounce a poet next thing to a madman: but *I* want no better evidence of their sound sense than their invincible disposition to eulogize the name of woman! But what's this? Hamlet. What does he say?

"'Frailty, thy name is woman!'

"Pshaw! he's a fool!" John impatiently exclaimed, closing the volume. "But let me see," he presently resumed, opening the book again. "That was Hamlet, and he is said to have been mad. Ha! I should think he was. I would want no better evidence of insanity on the part of any man. But here's Romeo. What does *he* say?

"'But soft? what light through yonder window breaks?
It is the east, and Juliet—'

"Maggie, it should have been—

"'—Is the sun.
Arise, fair sun, and—'"

At that moment the door swung gently open, and Miss Rosa entered. How beautiful she looked this morning! John felt sure that he had never before seen her looking *quite* so charming. The pleasant air had imparted the rosiest bloom to her cheeks. Never before had her lips looked so red, nor her eyes so blue! and her hair — darker, apparently, than usual—hung about her neck and shoulders in natural, wavy tresses, that looked decidedly killing.

"Good morning," said John, arising.

"Why, good—good morning!" Maggie returned, half-confusedly; having evidently entered without being aware of his presence.

"A fine morning," remarked Duffey, advancing, and taking her pretty hand.

"Lovely!" she returned. "Pray be seated, John."

Called him John! She may have done so before; but, if she had, John did not remember it. John! Not Mr. Duffey!

"It is—is a beautiful morning," he observed, as he resumed his seat, forgetting that he had already made a synonimous remark. He evidently had something on his mind, for he spoke in an absent way.

"Delightful!"

Oh, what an enthusiastic rejoinder!

"The weather has been beautiful during all the autumn and winter," remarked John.

"Unusually so."

There was a brief pause, during which both gazed out of the window, being seated near thereto, and consequently not *very* far from each other.

"Maggie!"

Miss Ross started. Her young friend had never before so pathetically pronounced her name.

John hesitated. "I was—I think—" he went on, after a moment; "I think I never saw such a—such a mild winter."

"Nor I."

Another pause ensued, during which Maggie frequently glanced out, as though silently regarding the beautiful weather; and Duffey gazed with unusual interest upon a very ordinary picture which hung upon the opposite wall, in which he had apparently discovered some new beauties.

"Maggie," observed John, again breaking the silence, "I was just thinking that—in fact—"

"What?" And Maggie looked at John—(At? Through!) —with *those eyes.*

"Why," continued John, "it has been—it has been, I believe, only—about—not quite a year since I became acquainted with you."

"Not quite," returned Maggie. (What a singular remark, she thought.)

"And yet," John went on, "I feel as though I had known you intimately for a long time—ten years, for instance."

"Y-yes."

Then followed a half-hour of alternate pauses, and fragments of conversation, in the course of which the weather was remarked on by Duffey, in a disconnected way, far oftener than the occasion seemed to demand. Not without repetition, either; for, no fewer than eight different times, he informed Maggie that it was indeed a very "fine day:" and we infer from this that his whole attention was scarcely given to this particular topic, or he would not have forgotten, from one minute to another, what remarks he had made.

At length, without exactly knowing what he meant, he remarked:

"How the time does pass away!"

Maggie said, "Yes."

Another pause followed, during which a look of determination gradually settled upon the face of Duffey, making it manifest that he had made up his mind to do something dreadful, and he said:

"Maggie, I 'm one of the worst kind of fellows—a rough—a—a—"

"Oh, no!" interrupted his companion. "Why do you say that?"

"Oh, yes I am!" John persisted; "I am not fit to be a companion to you. You are too good! and—"

"Nonsense!"

"And too beautiful"—growing eloquent—"for a rough mischievous, and even unfeeling fellow like me! And oh!—"

"You are foolish," interrupted Maggie, playfully. "Why are you beginning to rate yourself, and applaud me?"

"Because," returned John, growing desperate as he approached the point, "I have been absurd enough this morning to dare to entertain an intention of saying something to you, which, if not received with—with—" and John broke down.

"I am at a loss to comprehend you," said Maggie, in a tone

that sounded so much like genuine earnestness, that John really believed she was.

He saw that the time had come when he was called upon to establish his reputation either as "a man or a mouse;" and, resolved to ignore the character of the latter, he seized the hand of Miss Maggie, pressed it fervently between his own two hands, gazed unflinchingly (though not without a strenuous effort) into her pretty eyes—yes, her EYES!—and said:

"Maggie, I *must* tell you a little secret which I have held ever since I first saw you, and which I can reveal to no other than you. Shall I tell it you?"

"Why, yes; if you like to confide in me."

Oh, thought John, can it be possible that she does not suspect what it is!

She looked as though she di l n't, though; and he proceeded to enlighten her, after this wise:

"Maggie, dear Maggie!—darling Maggie!"—with increased emphasis—"I love you! I love you dearly! I love you beyond expression! I have loved you ever since I first saw you!—ever since that happy evening I called here on my way home! Yes, and from that time my love has never changed save to grow stronger! and thus will it be ever, though we should live a thousand years!"

Maggie averted her face from the earnest gaze of her lover, but made no very prodigious effort to withdraw the hand which he still pressed with passionate fervor, and upon which he even imprinted a kiss.

"Dear Maggie," John went on, "do not—oh, *do* not tell me coldly that you do not care for me! I can scarcely hope that you do; but I could no longer refrain from telling you what I have told you to-day! Do not tell me there is no hope,—even if there *is* none!—but let me dream on for awhile yet!—for a dream of your love is a bright vision I would not have abruptly dispelled! Oh, that it might last

forever! But tell me, oh, tell me that I need not entirely despair!"

Maggie was confused, and she murmured something about its being "so sudden," which is always considered equivalent to at least advising the solicitous lover not to hang himself for a day or two.

"I know it must have taken you by surprise," said John. "I never supposed you thought of anything of the kind, but—"

And, in fact, the young lovers—for we may now so term them—conversed freely on the interesting topic before them for half an hour.

During that half-hour, Duffey becoming convinced that he was not received entirely with disfavor, grew so bold as to state that without the idol of his heart—Maggie—the idea of his surviving anything like a year was absurd; and she being naturally inclined to philanthropy, and very much averse to being the cause of any one's death, however indirectly, did finally vouchsafe the assurance that he would not probably be required to live without the said idol—especially—"if—if—papa, you know—"

"Exactly." Papa did not seem a very formidable obstacle.

As elsewhere, the winter passed away smoothly, quietly and pleasantly, at Ira Tate's. As spring approached, Mary secretly made some little arrangements for the wedding, in the shape of some extra white dress or bonnet. She was resolved, as agreed between her and Philip, to keep the matter a profound secret, and thus astonish her uncle, aunt, cousin, and the people generally. She little imagined the shock that did await her friends!

Tilly's dream of love remained unbroken; but it must be confessed that she considered it a piece of unaccountable neglect in Ned that he had not yet proposed. She felt sure that the coming spring, at furthest, must bring matters to a crisis; and she was right.

Ira, during the whole of the gentle winter, was unusually cheerful and good-tempered; and it is stated of him, that

from the month of October to the month of March he only killed four chickens, one cat, and three small pigs, by way of appeasing his wrath, as occasion from time to time required. He did, one morning, smash a rake against the wall of the barn, because his head came in contact with the top of the door-frame, as he entered by the small door; but then it was an old rake, and of but little use—three of the teeth being gone, and the handle a little split.

Aunt Eliza still flourished at the farm-house, taking occasion as frequently as ever to point out the frailties of man. Ira often listened to her discourses with profound veneration; but always considered himself an exception to the general rule, because he was, in a manner, under the care and tuition of Aunt Eliza. Placing implicit reliance on everything she said, and believing the sentiments and opinions she promulgated to be nothing short of gospel, he often imagined that his own moral condition might finally have become fearful to contemplate had she not entered his household and taken upon herself the duty of keeping things generally "straight," and him in particular.

At the village, and especially at Tony's, everything went on as usual during the light winter in question. Ned Stanton visited his favorite place of resort almost as frequently as of old, and it was often his privilege to give his friend Dick the benefit of a common-sized octavo-volume-ful of his "mind."

Will Hempstead came occasionally to the village, and now and then spent an evening at Tony's with Ned, John Duffey, and others. But George Roland, who appeared of late to have "lost all his mirth," and to have grown taciturn and sedate, seldom visited Tony's, or remained long in the village when he came. All agreed that he was brooding on some subject, though none imagined what it was. When he met Philip Kirke, he neither spoke to him nor noticed him. Although not naturally sullen, he had certainly grown so during a year past; and his friends at times could scarcely refrain from growing quite impatient with him. If asked

whether he was unwell, he stated that he had never felt better in his life; that he thought himself, in fact, even improving in health, if anything, and growing more and more robust every day. Some attributed his altered manner to the disappointment his affections had undergone in losing Mary. But no! "The pangs of despised love" rankled bitterly enough in his bosom; but heavier still sat upon his spirit the delay of Justice!

CHAPTER XXX.

AN APRIL SHOWER.

"Come in like a lion, go out like a lamb," (or, *vice versa*,) is a familiar saying usually applied to the month of March, in connection with the weather, and supposed to imply that, if that month begin with storms of wind, rain, hail, snow, and all sorts of savage things calculated to remind one of the "king of beasts," it will, as a necessary consequence, end with such halcyon days of sunshine, and such delightful weather generally, as to be very suggestive of the quiet, peaceful nature of the youthful sheep; and if, on the other hand, the "lamb"-*weather* characterize the beginning of the month, if the first days of the month are calm, clear and pleasant, then the latter days of the same may reasonably be expected to bring with them such perturbances of the elements as may be appropriately likened only to the ferocious traits of the lion.

The March, succeeding the mild winter we have mentioned, did "come in" like a very lamb, and even maintained the gentle character of the sheep until the thirty-first, when there was a sudden change in the temperature of the atmos-

phere—a cold wind sprang up, snow-clouds arose, hid the sun and covered the whole face of the heavens, and there followed such a violent and protracted snow-storm as only the most liberal and consistent would have justified even in the depth of winter. For several days the snow continued to fall in heavy flakes, blown hither and thither by a violent wind, till about the third or fourth day in April, when, having attained the average depth of two feet and some odd inches—to say nothing of a fabulous drift here and there, capable of burying an ordinary habitation—it ceased to fall. The air continuing cold, and the snow betraying no indications of melting away speedily, sleds and sleighs came into requisition, and the bells were heard upon the public roads, tinkling as merry as ever in mid-winter.

As the pleasures of sleigh-riding had been necessarily ignored during the winter, and as, moreover, the idea of a sleighing-party in April presented novelties never before contemplated by the youth of the Weston settlement, they determined to improvise one, which they accordingly did. All entered into the arrangements, and on the very evening of the day on which the suggestion was made—the sky being clear and illumined by the full moon—a score of sleighs were flying along the mountain road, *en masse*, containing thirty-nine merry youths of both sexes. Philip Kirke was among them, accompanied by Mary, for whom he had hastily driven to the farm-house an hour before; George Roland, by Miss Kitty Hempstead; Will Hempstead, by Miss Duffey; Ned Stanton, by Tilly Tate; and John Duffey—by himself, having foregone the pleasure of any young lady's company on this occasion.

Away they went, up hill and down; now to the right, now to the left, until they had traversed all the principal roads for miles around. About midnight, having crossed and recrossed the mountain road half-a-dozen times, and having, in the abstract, enjoyed a pleasant ride of something like half-a-hundred miles, they found themselves at the cross-roads a

mile east of the village; and there all drew up for consultation.

"Whither now?" asked one.

"Home, I should say," responded another, no doubt beginning to tire of the sport, and probably to entertain visions of a warm bed and general repose for weary eyelids.

"Oh, not yet; not for a little while yet," said a third, whose enthusiasm had not yet cooled.

"Oh, not yet," urged a fourth, in support of number three; "not yet. We have had no such sport during the winter."

"And wont have again till next winter," suggested a fifth, in support of both.

"If even then," put in a sixth, with a view to present for consideration every possible contingency that might carry argumentative weight in favor of protracting the sport.

"But we 've traveled at least forty miles to-night," persisted the first speaker.

"Well, s'pose'n we make it fifty; another hour 'll do it *slickly*," observed an illiterate young man, who, in attempting to introduce a profound adverb, was certainly guilty of a *grammatical error;* a thing which classical men have argued cannot exist.

"The moon is fast declining," observed a thoughtful young man.

"And it would be so horrid to be left in total darkness," suggested a timid young lady.

"Especially if any accident should happen," added an apprehensive young lady—no other than Tilly.

There was a pause.

"Well, what shall we do?" asked one, impatiently. "Let us do *something*, and get home *some* time to-night."

"I'll tell you," proposed Philip Kirke: "let us all drive to the mountain, and leave Mary and Tilly at home—that will be an additional drive—then on our way back to the village others may be left at their homes by the way, as convenience may suggest. What do you all say?"

All acquiesced.

"And let's *go it* from here to the mountain," suggested a youthful farmer, who, by the expression "go it," designed to convey some idea of extreme speed.

"So fast that the bells wont have time to rattle," added another, by way of enlarging on the proposition.

"Well, away then!" said one, as all prepared to move out the road, "and best horse in front! Come up! Galang! Hurrah! Who 'll beat to the mountain?"

Catching a spirit of emulation, all now drove forward at headlong speed; and the way the snow flew; and the way the bells rattled; and the way the road seemed to glide from beneath the festive party; and the way the trees, and bushes, and fences, and fields, and woods, and houses, and barns flew by in quick succession; and the way the light sleighs leaped over little eminences, and swept round curves in the road; and the way the merry party laughed, and shouted, and cheered, and rallied each other—the foremost calling to the hindmost and asking them if they had stopped entirely, or whether they might be expected at Mr. Tate's house by daylight; and the way the dogs barked along the route, and were answered by others not along the route, was, altogether, to say the least of it, marvelous.

"Who 's ahead?" asked John Duffey, when they had arrived within a mile of Mary's home.

"Phil Kirke is now," was the response.

"I 'll pass him!" exclaimed John.

"And *I 'll* pass *you!*" said George Roland, suddenly plying his whip and taking the start of John.

John also hastily used his whip, and the two horses, drawing the light vehicles after them, shot forward with increased swiftness; but that of George, getting the start of John's pony, exerted himself so strenuously, that in a few minutes George had outstripped all, and found himself the leader of the party. Duffey followed him closely until both had passed Philip, but he was unable to take the lead. Philip, stung at

being surpassed by George, even in so small a matter, resolved to make a most desperate effort to recover the position he had lost; and putting the whip to his horse, he was immediately flying forward at a pace that promised soon to restore him to the advance. The horse he drove was a spirited one; and when within half a mile of Ira's house, he repassed John Duffey, and found himself once more in the advance of all but George. Their near approach to the end of the route rendered Philip more desperate, and he would now almost have "set his life" on the attempt to outstrip his hated enemy. He again plied his whip with increased vigor, was soon immediately in the rear of George, and turned aside slightly, in order, if possible, to pass.

"Hurrah, Kirke!" shouted several.

"Go it Roland!" responded others.

Kirke did "hurrah," and Roland did "go it." Philip gained upon him for a moment, until his sleigh was running directly by the side of the other; perceiving which, George applied the lash to his horse more freely, and for the space of half a minute the two horses kept perfect pace with each other.

"Be careful, Phil," shouted one; "you are approaching a steep precipice that runs by the road just ahead!"

But, reckless of danger, and half maddened, he paid no heed to the friendly warning, and onward, with even pace, the two equipages flew. They were fast nearing an almost perpendicular declivity, two hundred yards in length, which ran parallel with the road. It was about one hundred feet in depth, and its face was horrent with craggy rocks and stunted trees; while at its base flowed a large stream—a stream lately rendered famous by the large quantities of petroleum its banks have produced. The road ran directly along the brink of this steep descent, and there was no railing, or fence, or anything of the kind for the security of the traveler. This precipice was on the right-hand side of the road, and it was the right side Philip had chosen—which

proved frightfully *wrong* for *him*. At the critical moment, the horse he drove became excited and unmanageable, made a sudden *detour* to the right, as if to spring away from George's sleigh; and, amid a tempest of screams, Philip, Mary, horse, sleigh, and a profusion of buffalo-robes, blankets and straw, toppled over the brink, and went tumbling down the declivity, scattering and lodging here and there among the jutting rocks and snow-covered trees, rolling and falling, down, down, down, toward the cold waters below.

The horses were all speedily checked in that moment of horror; and the young men, leaving the animals in the care of their fair companions, or making them fast to such saplings as were convenient, rushed to the scene of the pitiable wreck. The sleigh was shivered almost to splinters, and fragments of it had lodged here and there upon the trees and rocks; the horse was lying in the bed of the creek, two of its legs broken and its head terribly bruised; Mary, fortunately, had not come in direct contact with any of the rocks or trees in her sudden descent, and the snow had saved her from any serious bruise; but she had been unable to arrest her downward flight till she had actually landed in the creek, where her clothes became saturated with the cold water. Philip, however, had come in violent collision with a projecting rock, a little way from the brink, and had received a severe contusion on the head, which had rendered him insensible; then, after receiving other bruises in the course of his downward progress, had lodged against a small tree, whence he was now taken up for dead. Mary was assisted to the road, and, in her solicitude for him, soon forgot her late fearful descent, and her still wet garments.

"He 's dead!" exclaimed one of the girls, who had not yet got sight of the insensible form.

"Yes, that 's certain," responded Tilly, who also kept as far away as possible.

"No, he is not dead," said John Duffey, who had assisted in carrying him up the steep ascent.

"Only a little insensible from a knock on the head," added Ned Stanton, "and will soon be well enough."

"What shall we do with him?" asked one.

"Oh," responded Mary, "bring him to our house; it is only a quarter of a mile or so."

"By all means," urged Tilly; "and some one send the doctor up as soon as possible."

"Put him in my sleigh," said John Duffey, "and I will drive him up to Mr. Tate's house. One of you take Mary in."

"Here, Mary," said Will Hempstead, "get into my sleigh." And Mary was assisted in the sleigh, in which there was ample room for three.

The unconscious form of Philip was carefully placed in Duffey's sleigh; then all drove slowly toward the adjacent house of Ira Tate.

"That puts an end to our sport," suggested a sage individual, as all moved on at a funeral pace.

"An unhappy end, I fear," responded one who was an adherent of the prepare-for-the-worst-and-hope-for-the-best principle.

"Oh, do you think he 'll die?" asked Tilly, in alarm; for she could not help thinking what a terrible thing a death would be in their house.

This conversation was not carried on within the hearing of Mary.

"There 's no knowing," returned the other; "I 've known of smaller things to cause death."

"Horrible!" shuddered Tilly.

"'As long as there is life there is hope,' you know," observed another; which, so far from restoring the party to quietude, rather enhanced their apprehensions; for that 's what the doctor always says when he is sure his patient cannot survive a day.

"Oh, if he dies!—" ejaculated Tilly; and did n't say what the consequence would be.

"No danger of his dying," said Ned Stanton. "On the contrary, it will do him good. Why, if it were not for a little such knock now and then, by way of waking up the system, no man would ever live to any reasonable age. Such accidents are always turned to account. I am really sorry it was n't myself that fell over the precipice, instead of him."

"You might go and throw yourself over yet," suggested one.

"I would," returned Ned, "only that I want to take Tilly home, and drive quickly to the village and send the doctor up—as the doctor, you know, can materially assist in making this little accident a benefit to Kirke's future health."

On the arrival of the party at the farm-house, Philip was again placed, still insensible, upon the bed he had occupied after his rescue from the cave; and Ned Stanton, bidding Tilly a hearty adieu, departed, promising to send the doctor immediately.

The rest of the party, most of whom had entered the house to see Philip by the light of a candle, in order better to judge the extent of his injuries, soon after departed, quietly expressing many apprehensions for the sufferer—and thus ended the APRIL SLEIGHING-PARTY.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A FEARFUL SUSPICION.

AFTER the doctor had come and departed, Mary, having exchanged her wet clothes for dry ones, hastened to the bedside of Philip, where she found Ira watching. Philip had returned to physical consciousness, but was mentally wander-

ing; now and then discoursing most eloquently of strange and inexplicable things.

"What does the doctor say?" Mary asked.

"He says he don't know what to say, but that he will come back in the course of the day and find out," was the satisfactory reply.

"Oh, I wonder if he 'll get over it," said Mary.

Ira could n't say, really.

"How has he been injured?" Mary asked.

"There is a cut on his head, which was bleeding when the doctor came, and a bruise or two on his body, which, the doctor says, ain't much."

If Mary had been in a jesting frame of mind, she might have wondered whether he meant the body was n't much, or the bruises. She did not speak, however; and Ira, suddenly remembering something else the doctor had said, resumed:

"He says that if he ain't got hurt in'ardly, and do n't get a fever, he 'll soon be well."

Both were silent for awhile, and, at length, Mary said:

"Uncle, we have disturbed you. Return to your bed, and—"

"You had better go yourself, child," he interrupted.

"No—oh, no! I could not sleep! So, go yourself, uncle, that you may feel more fresh when the morning comes. I will watch for the present; and, should he get worse, I will call you. Besides, Aunt Eliza is up: and Tilly will not go to bed either."

Ira, to save the trouble of talking, as much as for any other reason, reluctantly withdrew; and Mary was left alone with the sufferer.

A white bandage encircled his forehead, and, being deathly pale, his appearance was quite ghastly. Now and then he uttered extemporaneous flights of words, with such touching emphasis and such effective gesticulations, that an orator, or a tragedian, might have been benefited, in point of instruction, by being present. By and by Tilly entered.

"Oh, Tilly!" exclaimed Mary, no longer caring to conceal the feeling she entertained for Philip, "I am afraid he will die! Oh, I never told you how well I love him!"

Tilly cried—not so much for the sufferer, as with the thought: "What if it had been my Ned, instead of him!" Remembering that it was n't however, she suddenly concluded that she had great reason to rejoice, instead of weep; and the abruptness with which she returned to moderate cheerfulness was quite wonderful.

At this juncture, Philip, who had been all the while muttering, elevated his voice, and descanted of death, fire, fiends, and all sorts of immoderate things. To add to the general effect, a feverish spot of glowing red had come upon each cheek, and an unusual fire gleamed from his dark eyes.

"Oh, Tilly, he will die! I know he will!" Mary exclaimed, in anguish. "Since the accident I have experienced a strange feeling that I never felt before!—one that can be no less than the foreshadowing of some dreadful calamity!"

"Oh, nonsense! No danger of his dying!" returned Tilly, who, nevertheless, felt sure he would. "He won't, you know! Don't fear! He won't die! He can't die! I 'm sure of it!" All this in default of any better argument.

"But oh, how he is talking!"

"Merely talking in his sleep," said Tilly.

"But see how feverish he is."

"That's a good sign—a healthy color."

"But his wild look! See—"

"Oh, Bill, take me from this accursed place!" Philip exclaimed. "Take me away. I 'll stay here no longer!"

"Oh, hear that!" Mary exclaimed.

"What does he say?" queried Tilly, who had certainly heard as distinctly as Mary.

"Oh, he don't know what he is saying!" returned Mary. "I wish the doctor would come again!"

"He 'll be better by daylight, surely," said Tilly, whose

secret apprehensions rather admonished her that he would probably expire about that time.

"Bill, you 're a fool!" Philip vociferated.

"Whom does he mean by Bill?" asked Tilly.

"I do n't know: some old friend, no doubt. Oh, Tilly! what shall I do?"

Thus appealed to, Miss Tilly proceeded to give a little advice on that point, occupying five minutes or so, the substance of which was, not to do anything particular.

"Go and sleep, Tilly," said Mary, when Philip had grown more quiet; "I will stay here."

"But," objected Tilly, "you need rest, and—"

"Rest!" returned Mary. "Yes, I need rest; but I can see no rest till he is well. No, Tilly, there is no rest for *me!*"

Alas, Mary! Doomed never more to see rest in this world!

Tilly withdrew; but, instead of seeking repose, joined Aunt Eliza in the kitchen. The latter had not visited the bed-side of Philip, at all; probably fearing that, should she witness his sufferings, she might be induced to relent, in a measure, toward the male race.

Philip, after half-an-hour of comparative quiet, grew restless, and began to manifest an inclination to promulgate the secrets of his heart.

"Ha! ha!" he exclaimed, wildly; "your life is in my hands, and you *die!* Hah! hah! Keep your powder dry, after this, and you 'll stand a better chance in a duel! I knew I 'd kill him! What a fool he was to fight me! But, how horrible he looks!" he went on, with a changed manner. "How pale! How ghastly! How the blood flows from his neck! How his glazed eyes stare! Take him away!" And he seemed ready to start from his bed in terror.

Mary shuddered. What terrible affair was the delirious man raving of? Could it be possible that he had ever been a duelist?—that he had "killed his man?" Preposterous! Had such been the case, would he not, long ere this, have confided

it to her? Certainly! Oh! now she had it. He was only thinking of the robber he had killed in Weston! That was it. How foolish! But list!

"Ah!" he went on, in a depressed tone, "what a vile den is this! How damp! how dark! how full of crime! Have I come to this? A forger! a robber! Who are these, my companions? The outcast rubbish of this city: thieves, robbers, forgers, murderers? Is this—*can* this be myself? How long since I was an innocent, bright-eyed boy at school? How long since I was an honest lad at college? How long since my nature changed?—Since I became a—a—*murderer?* Away from me, vile associates! Culprits, criminals, away! I'll have no more to do with you! You contaminate me! Away! away! I'll lead an honest life, henceforth!"

Mary stared at her delirious lover, in dread perplexity. What *could* such words mean? Could it be possible that the man on whom she had centered her affections was a reformed robber? Not to say—No! oh, no! that *could* not be! No doubt he was only rehearsing some thrilling tale which he had read, and which had now chanced to intrude itself upon his bewildered brain!

"Bill! Bill! You fool!" Philip suddenly ejaculated. "Do you think to make a murderer of me?—a *murderer?*—and that for GOLD? Take away the gold! I will have none of it! I will not touch it! I will not look at it! It is the price of *blood!*—BLOOD!—BLOOD!"

"Philip! Philip!" Mary exclaimed, seating herself at the bedside, and gazing earnestly upon the flushed face. "Philip! don't you know me?"

"Away! away with the gold!" he continued. "Hide it in the crevices of this wretched cave, and let me never look upon it! Bill, you're a murderer!—and *you've made me one!*"

"He must be thinking of Delany's Cave," murmured Mary, half-sobbing. "He imagines he is still wandering about there. But what of the gold? What of the murders?"

"I tell you I am going to leave you, and live an honest life!" Philip continued, violently. "I will live no longer in this cave, with such low, thieving, murdering companions! I'll repent—if a murderer can repent!—and—and what! You dare not betray me to the people of the settlement! If you do I'll hunt you down, like wild beasts, till I have your lives! Oh, it will do you no good to flee! I'll follow you to the world's end but I will be revenged, if you betray me! I'll hang upon your tracks as a blood-hound! I'll give you no rest, day nor night! I'll torment you till life itself becomes a burden to you!—ay, till you thirst for the repose of hell!"

Philip grew more and more violent, as he approached the termination of this effusion, executing the last sentence with extraordinary effect.

"Philip! Philip!" Mary exclaimed. All her heart-rending anguish concentrated in a burst of passionate words, "Philip! Philip! Don't talk so strangely! Oh, do not, or you'll break my heart! You are saying such frightful words! Do you not know me? Do you not know who I am? This is I—Mary White—your Mary!—your own Mary! Oh, speak to me! Speak to me, if you love me!"

"White?" he whispered, hoarsely. "That name! White? Mary White? Not poor old Harry White's daughter? Not *his* daughter? Her whom he so loved? For whom he lived? What! Away! Do not touch me! I'll contaminate you! I am covered with *blood!*—yes, with BLOOD!—*his* blood!—and for gold!—*gold!*—GOLD! Bill, you fiend, it's all your fault! I'll kill you! *I* did not strike the old man down! You lie, if you say I did! Sam, *you* did it! I only caught his horse! You knocked him down upon the road, and you and Joe beat him upon the head, till I saw the blood start out among his silvery hair! The pale moonlight shone on him through the trees!—and, oh, such a ghastly sight!"

He was quiet for a minute; then, in a subdued tone, went on:

"Carefully now! Handle him carefully! We must place him in the boat, and take him to the cave. He must not die! He *must* not? He *shall* not! No—and yet—I dare not let him live! Why, he would tell every one that I am a robber and murderer!—that I dwell in a cave with a clan of devils! He must die! He must die! and all for gold!—*gold!*—GOLD!"

Philip had arisen almost to a sitting posture during the delivery of these words, and he now sank back upon his pillow, as if exhausted. Mary sat motionless, like one in a trance, her eyes fixed upon the opposite wall. In a moment, Philip, his eyes wandering vacantly about the apartment, and his arms performing sundry wild gesticulations, continued, in a low, husky voice:

"Why, how pale he looks! Remove those drops of blood from his haggard face! How he stares at me! I tell you," he went on, beginning to grow violent again, "I did not do it! Old man, it was not I that struck the blow! But why did you confide to me that you would travel that road with *gold?* I would not have waylaid you then. But I say it was not I that murdered you! No, I would not do such a thing! You have been too kind to me! Have I not often sat by your fireside, and at your table?—and would *I* murder you, and that for *gold?* No! I will not touch the gold! I swear it! I saw a drop of your blood upon it, and should I touch it, it would stain my hand forever! Take your gold! Take it—go to your home, and tell Mary that I saved your life, instead of taking it! Do not tell her that I am the leader of this band of robbers and murderers, and that we live in a hole in the earth, like serpents! If you do—What! Dying! No, no, no! You must not die! If you die, then I am a murderer, indeed!"

Mary still sat, pale and motionless as a marble statue, yet heard and noted every word of the wicked man's ravings: and such a fearful suspicion had seized upon her mind, and so suddenly, that her senses were almost paralysed. She could

not move, nor cry, nor scream; but sat motionless, as though waiting to hear more. Philip again started suddenly from his pillow, and, in a low and almost unearthly voice, exclaimed:

"Dead? Dead? Can he be dead? He is not—you know he is not, Bill! If so, why does he stare at me so? Can a dead man fix his eyes upon his murderer? Perhaps he can. See his cold eyes! They are riveted upon me, and I cannot look away! Is that the grim stare of death? Why does he look thus upon me? Because I murdered him! Because I betrayed him? Ay, that's it! Take him away! He is dead! Take him far away, and bury him deep in the earth, else in the solemn night his spirit will haunt us in this dismal cave! His blood will come and dwell in horrid spots upon these walls, and his very bones will rattle in the dark corners! Away with him! Away with him! I've murdered him, I know, but I cannot bring him to life! Take him away! Take him away! Let me look no more on the stark form of the old man I have deceived and murdered! Let me look no longer on the glassy eyes that are gazing now upon me with a mute curse for the bloody deed I have done!—the black deed I have done for *gold!*—for GOLD!"

Philip fell back completely exhausted; the flush left his cheeks, his eyes closed, and he became deadly pale.

The faint light of early morning came struggling in through the half-closed window; and the expiring candle that stood upon the table shed a ghastly and lurid glow about the room, and especially upon the face of the wretched man. A moment of silence ensued within, while, without, "the cock's shrill clarion" proclaimed the near approach of day. The door opened, and Mary's cousin entered, exclaiming:

"What is the matter? Is he still delirious? Why, how you look!"

Mary arose, staggered toward her cousin, tottered, and fell swooning to the floor.

Tilly uttered a scream that aroused her father, who had lain down upon a settee in the next room; and startled Aunt Eliza, who sat dozing in the kitchen: and but for the exigency of the occasion, she would certainly have swooned, herself. Ira and Aunt Eliza soon appeared at the door, and simultaneously jumped to the conclusion that Philip had expired suddenly, and that Mary had naturally fainted in consequence; but a little investigation disclosed the fact that Philip was still alive, though lying in a very ominous stupor, totally unconscious.

Mary was lifted from the floor, and carried to another room, when restoratives, chiefly in the shape of camphor, were applied with eminent success. Aunt Eliza consolingly informed her, immediately on her resuscitation, that Philip was still alive, and that there were the most flattering hopes of his remaining alive for a long time to come, which piece of information had not quite the prodigiously good effect anticipated.

Before the April sun the heavy snow melted gradually away, the landscapes and the mountains once more looked forth, and in a few days the trees began to bud and blossom, and the grass to shoot up.

For several weeks the good doctor of Weston had two patients at the house of Ira Tate, both requiring daily care. As he made it a point to administer to his patients as few potent drugs as possible, and as he observed this rule in the case of Mary and Philip, they gradually revived: and within a week after the accident he found himself able to pronounce both out of danger. Philip rallied faster than Mary, and when he found himself able to return to the village,—which was a little more than two weeks after the accident,—Mary had not yet left her room. She was visibly improving, physically, however; but none knew how sick at heart she was. Philip fancied that her adieu, on his departure, was very cold; but he attributed it to her illness. He spoke very soothing words to her on taking his leave, urging her, for her

own sake, to cheer up; and she almost felt like trusting him again. But, ah! the terrible words he had uttered in his ravings! How could they be accounted for, unless her lover was actually a party to the murder of her father? Oh, could it be possible that he was leagued with the very band of robbers that had so long infested the neighborhood? "If such a thing be barely possible," thought Mary, "I dare not marry him! Oh, it cannot be!—and yet, my suspicions once aroused, however unjust they may be, I cannot be united with him till every doubt is set at rest. And what shall I do?—shall I ask him explicitly if he murdered my father? Why, if innocent, what would he think of such a question? and yet—Ha! what better means of testing the matter? If he is guilty—but, oh, I dare not think he is!—but if he is, how he must start and turn pale!—how he must be struck dumb, if, when we are alone, I abruptly say—'Dear Philip, did you murder my father?' But if innocent, how his face would glow with wonder at such a strange question! He would think me a little out of my mind, or that I was jesting, and he would reply accordingly. What better finesse could I resort to? So surely as I ask the unexpected question, I will see GUILT or INNOCENCE written upon his face. I am resolved to try it! Oh, Heaven! forbid that I should see a trace of guilt upon his face, when the trial comes!—for oh, I love him still! I love him still!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

A LASTING SEPARATION.

"The course of true love never will run smooth," it has been stated by those pretending to know; and there is little doubt that almost every one's experience in that line would go to sustain the assertion. It is difficult to see any plausible

reason *why* "the course of true love" should not, as a rule, "run smooth;" but when we come to examine the testimony of thousands and thousands—ay, thousands of thousands—upon this point, we are reluctantly led to exclaim, in the language of Polonius:

"'Tis true, 'tis true;
And pity 'tis, 'tis true:"

or, in plain parlance, there is no doubt of the truth of the adage that "the course of true love will never run smooth," and that such is the case, is much to be deplored by mortals —most of whom are prone to love.

The case of Mr. John Duffey, and Miss Maggie Ross, was not one calculated to assist in proving the adage a fallacy. John had visited Maggie several times since his declaration of love, and each had become unreservedly convinced that the other's love was true, pure, holy, self-sacrificing, abiding, permanent and everlasting; and, in fact, that there were not enough adjectives in the English vocabulary to define its superior quality. They believed that others had loved before them; indeed, they had but little doubt of the fact; but the idea that any happy couple, at any age of the world, had ever loved, or would ever love, "as they loved," they regarded as wholly preposterous. Such a thing could n't be.

On a pleasant day in April, long after all traces of the untimely snow had disappeared, and when vegetation was fast awaking for a summer career, John Duffey, mounted upon the inevitable pony, visited New Market. He really had, on this occasion, some business to transact in that village for his father; but it must not be concealed that he resolved from the outset not to return without paying the accustomed visit to the creature whom he deemed so indispensable to his existence. Accordingly, having performed his errand in New Market, (*a la* "business before pleasure,") he remounted his pony, and soon had the satisfaction of drawing rein in front of the neat little "brick house with the white paling fence." He knew Mr. Ross himself was not within, having

seen him at his store in the village, and having been urged by him to "call at the house," which he had, with apparent reluctance, promised to do. On knocking at the door, he was admitted by Miss Maggie, in person; and it must be confessed that he was a little surp ised—considering that no one else was present—that she did not rush spontaneously into his arms. His surprise—painful surprise!—was heightened, too, by an almost unmistakable display of coldness on her part.

"How do you do, Maggie? I am so glad to see you!" he exclaimed, warmly, grasping both her hands, with his accustomed cordiality.

"Pretty well. How do *you* do?" she replied, and immediately took the liberty of withdrawing one of her hands to close the door.

"This is delightful weather," John remarked.

"Very."

John, who had of late felt himself "quite at home" in Mr. Ross's house, walked straight to the little parlor, and seated himself. Maggie also entered; whereupon Duffey observed that he hoped Mrs. Ross was quite well.

"Quite well, I thank you, sir."

She thanked him, sir! This cold, formal manner of her's to-day was not only inexplicable, but almost intolerable.

"Is she at home, to-day?" he asked.

"Not to-day," was the brief reply. And Maggie seated herself as far from her lover as possible, without going outside the room.

John ventured to inquire whether Mrs. Ross had gone far?

"No, not far," was the laconic reply.

"You are not well, I fear," suggested John, entirely at a loss to account for Maggie's cool manner.

"As well as usual, I believe," was the icy reply.

"Have you been ill lately?" Duffey asked, determined to sift the matter.

"Not at all. Do I look as though I had?" Maggie returned, in a tone that almost froze her lover.

"N—n—no—I can't say—"

"Well?"

John did not speak again for a brief space, hoping that Maggie would break the silence. But she sat immovable. During the conversation she had not once fixed her eyes on him.

"Maggie!"

"Well?"

"Maggie, what *is* the matter with you?" John asked, passionately.

"Nothing. Do you *see* anything the matter with me?" she replied, coldly as ever.

"Maggie," he went on, earnestly, "is this the reception I meet with at your hands, after looking forward to this day with joyful anticipation, for—*two weeks?* Yes, for two weeks has the errand been projected which brought me to New Market today; and during all that time I have lived—ay, eaten, drank and slept!—only in anticipation of the pleasure of seeing you on this occasion—you, who are all the world to me!"

All-the-world-to-him was silent.

"Maggie," he continued, "I know it is but a trifling journey from Weston to New Market,—especially when the weather is so pleasant,—but were the distance a hundred times as great, and the wildest storms of winter raging, the journey would still be trifling compared with that I would undergo to see you! I would scorn alike the heat of the tropics, and the snow and ice of Greenland, did they intervene between you and me! I would row across the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans in an open boat,—I would traverse all the deserts of the globe, without shoes, to meet you!—and to—to get the—the welcome kiss, which—which I fondly but vainly hoped,—" and John was unable to proceed.

Maggie was visibly touched.

"Oh," exclaimed John, in the agony of heart which the bare thought engendered, "can it be possible that you no longer love me?"

"You—you wrong me—if—if you think that," returned Maggie, having found utterance at last.

"Then what—oh, *what* has transpired, that you receive me so coldly to-day?"

"I love you as—as ever—I never ceased—to—to love you; but—but—I have a—a cousin in Weston,—a Miss—Miss—" And Maggie burst into tears.

John thought it very inconsistent of Maggie to reproach him because she chanced to have a cousin who resided in Weston. He felt sure that it was no fault of his. He had never advised her to have a cousin in Weston; he had never urged that cousin to establish her residence in Weston; nor had he ever even hinted to that cousin the propriety of remaining in Weston—that he was aware of. He had never known before that a cousin of Maggie's dwelt in Weston, nor could he now, in a dozen guesses, have told who that cousin was.

"Well?" he said, impatiently waiting for Maggie to go on, and feeling sure that he could exonerate himself from whatsoever blame might seemingly attach itself to him relative to the existence of the (no doubt) annoying cousin.

"It is—is Miss—Miss McKnight—Miss Jennie McKnight, sobbed Maggie.

"Well, I know her. She is your cousin, is she?"

"Yes."

"Well, what of her?"

"She—she was here last—last week." And the tears fell fast.

This was wonderful. Had he sent her? Was he, in any wise, the cause of the visit? Had he even told her that Maggie would doubtless be happy to see her? Not that he knew of. No, certainly not. So far from being ever before cognizant of the relationship that existed between the two young ladies, he had never even learned that they were known to each other.

"You say she was here?"

"Yes—oh yes!"

"Did—did she stay long?" asked Duffey, who, for the life of him, could think of nothing else to say.

"Long enough to—to break—" and Maggie could say no more.

What could she mean? Miss McKnight had broken—what? Had she smashed the mirror? had she dashed the clock to pieces by a blow with a chair or fire-poker? had she shattered the window? had she knocked down three or four shelves of China? Miss McKnight was now a young lady of thirty-five or forty, and John had never yet known her to be so naughty.

"Break what, Maggie?" he asked, after being, for a little while, lost in a complication of miscellaneous surmises.

"My heart!" returned Maggie, letting it out in one sudden burst of anguish; and she sobbed more than ever.

"Maggie, dear Maggie, I cannot comprehend you. Pray tell me what affects you so," pleaded John, earnestly.

"She told me of—of—some things," sobbed Maggie.

"What things?"

"Oh, John, did I ever—*could* I ever—"

John hoped not.

"—Ever have thought it!"

"Maggie, do speak plainly! Don't go on so, or—" and John hinted that he would not undertake to answer for the consequences to his own heart.

"She told me of—of—a—a sleighing-party! Oh, John, *did* I ever think it!"

"Think what?"

"Jennie herself did not go that night—"

"True; if I remember correctly, Miss McKnight was not one of the party," returned John.

"But she told me that you went, and—"

"And what?"

"She didn't know what *young lady* you took!"

"Maggie!"

"John, my name is Miss Ross," admonished Maggie, with an attempt at the indignant.

"Maggie, my name is Mr. Duffey," he retorted, catching the same spirit.

"I know—oh, I know!" she rejoined; "but I thought I would love to call you John—as in the happy days passed forever—once more before—"

"Before what?" asked John, who now felt his senses swimming.

"Before we part for ever," returned Maggie, with a firmness that was awful.

"Maggie!"

"Hereafter we must be strangers," she continued, by way of more fully disclosing the frightful resolve she had made. "And, all I ask—is—is—as the years go by, you—you may sometimes think—"

"Maggie! Maggie! Would you—oh, would you?—"

"Yes, for your own happiness, I have resolved to—to give—you up—give you up to the young lady—no doubt much prettier than I am!—whom you were so agreeable as to—to take sleigh-riding, for—for—a—whole night! Yes, to her, if it will only make you happy, I commend you—although—although—it will break my heart! But take her—and—may you be happy!"

"Maggie, wait till you have heard me," pleaded John.

"Oh, I have heard enough! Too much! Too much!"

"But listen:—shall I marry the person I took sleigh-riding that night?"

"Yes,—yes,—if it will make you happy, and I hope it will."

"If *you* will not marry me, Maggie, then the very person whom I took sleigh-riding is the one I will marry,—and the only one I ever can marry."

"Oh, I knew it! I knew it!" exclaimed Maggie, with a burst of anguish, now fully convinced that some wretched

young lady at Weston had irrevocably stolen her lover's affections.

"But you have not yet learned who it was," said John.

"Oh, I don't want to know," Maggie returned. "I think it would kill me to hear her name! I suppose it is Laura, or Ida, or Minnie, or some sweet name. But, oh, do n't tell it to me! Let me not hear it spoken!"

"But I must tell you, Maggie," replied John: "it was *no one*—and such must be my future partner, if I am doomed to live without you."

This was something which Maggie had not looked for, and she was taken slightly aback. She did not speak, but hung her head, while her lover went on.

"Yes, Maggie," he said, "I accompanied the sleighing-party, but no one went with me. How I did wish that you had been there, to sit beside me in my sleigh, and enjoy with me the evening's sport! But you were not there; I could not take another, and I went alone, even at the risk of being called selfish. I would not have gone at all, only that I have been rallied so much of late about losing my former spirit; and about becoming an old man all of a sudden; and about growing sedate, and even misanthropic; and about having become very religious, and having resolved to forego the pleasures of this world; and so, little thinking that it would cause a lasting separation between you and me, I, to prove that my neighbors did n't know everything, attended the sleighing party, in a sleigh by myself. Could you blame me for that. No, I think not, when I tell you that I was thinking of you during the whole evening, and wishing that you were by my side!"

"Oh, John, forgive me!" exclaimed Maggie, arising to meet her lover, who was drawing near, and throwing herself so energetically into his arms that he nearly let her fall. "Oh, forgive me! I should never have doubted you! Only forgive me, and I will never be so foolish again!"

He forgave her, and even stayed for dinner; after which

he returned to Weston, more dearly loved, and loving more dearly, than ever before.

It is related of this happy pair, who more and more frequently saw each other as the pleasant spring and summer days rolled on, that they did not quarrel again for nearly three weeks.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE SPY-GLASS.

PHILIP KIRKE visited Mary a number of times during the interval between his return to the village after his illness, and the projected wedding-day. He must have been very dull not to have observed her changed manner toward him. He did observe it, and several times asked the cause; but she answered evasively, and failed, from time to time, to sum up sufficient moral courage to carry out the singular finesse by which she had resolved to prove his innocence or guilt. At times, while in his company, Mary felt that her suspicions must be absurd, and that to entertain them for a moment was truly ridiculous; but then again, when she was alone, and began to reflect impartially on the words she had heard him utter, she was constrained to regard it as almost certain that he was her father's murderer. And, oh, what agony the fearful contemplation gave her! What a gnawing at the heart it produced! what anguish of spirit! what a maddening of the brain! How it shocked the mind! how it bowed down the body! What! *he* on whom she had, for several years, bestowed the deepest and holiest affections of her

heart—*he* a robber and a murderer? *He*, seemingly so frank, and noble, and brave—*he* a treacherous villain? *He* an inhuman wretch? his heart full of knavery and deceit? his hands red with blood, and his soul black with crime?

"O, horrible! O, horrible! Most horrible!"

Ah, cruel fortune! inexorable fate! what is there in such a foul nature to win the pure heart of an innocent girl? Is it the same deadly infatuation which the serpent uses to lure the unsuspecting bird to his poisonous fangs?

On the afternoon of the twelfth of May, Philip visited the rendezvous of the robbers, and remained a long time in conversation with Bill and the other worthies. When he left the cave, which was about three o'clock, he resolved to proceed at once to Ira Tate's, for the purpose of consulting Mary regarding some minor arrangements for the important affair projected for the ensuing day—namely, the wedding. He had no sooner left the cave than he began to experience a strange inward sense of some unseen presence hovering about him. In passing through the wood, he turned often, and cast quick glances to the right, to the left, and behind him; and manifested every indication of feeling ill at ease. All the way through the thick woods he imagined that a kind of invisible cloud hovered about him, and floated steadily along as he walked—always keeping pace with him. Several times he felt that some one must be following him, hanging upon his steps, and watching his movements; and he frequently turned about him with a nervous, abrupt manner, and scanned the quiet and intricate path he had just traveled, but always without effect—nothing was to be seen. Still the strange cloud, like some ill vapor from the spirit world, crept along with him in his walk. Sometimes it assumed a silent voice, and whispered to Philip that there was some one behind him; then he would turn about with a start and see—nothing; then the voice would whisper that it was behind him still—that it turned when he turned, and always remained hanging at his back. Thus, in silent, indefinable terror, with

many a fitful start, he made his way to the road. But now that he was clear of the woods, and the sun could shine upon him, his uneasiness took a new shape: his own shadow became a source of annoyance to him. While he walked, he fancied that it was not, as it should be, the counterpart of his own motions; but that it danced about him, and stared at him, and grinned horribly, and made hideous faces, and taunted him in a mute way that was quite monstrous. Once he imagined that it had actually taken to its heels and run away from him; but before he could turn, it had, apparently, hurried back to its place again; and there it lay, flat upon the dusty road, looking as grave, quiet and solemn, and as far removed from any visible inclination to play the antic as the shadow of the veriest Bishop or D.D. This appeared more provoking than anything else, and Philip actually stamped upon it with rage; but this having no effect, he turned, walked swiftly on again, and never looked back, nor to the right or left, till he reached the cross-roads, a mile east of the village. He then turned at once toward the mountain, resolved to walk all the way to the farm-house, as he had often done before. The sun being nearly in the west, his shadow was now almost in front of him, so that he could keep his eye upon it; and it was really remarkable how well it behaved. Still he imagined that there was another shadow behind him, over him, or somewhere near; and he frequently turned him about to observe whether any material form or figure might be pursuing him. On one of these occasions he descried a horseman coming after him at a brisk trot; and he discovered, as he came nearer, that it was Ned Stanton. Ned soon overtook him, and his presence speedily dispelled all the strange dread which had haunted him since leaving the cave.

"Hilloa, Phil! That you?" Ned called out, on arriving within speaking distance.

"Yes, Ned," Philip returned, assuming a manner of easy

gayety, "and that is you—dressed up, too! Now where can you be going?"

"Why, I have an errand up near the mountain," Ned returned.

"Yes, I'll venture you have—at Ira Tate's, too," said Philip.

"I may call there before I go back," rejoined Ned; "but I swear—"

"No use protesting," interrupted Philip; "you know you are going directly and unequivocally to Ira's."

"Well," admitted Ned, "perhaps I will go there first. But where might *you* be going now?"

"Oh, I am merely taking a little walk toward the mountain," returned Philip. "It is a beautiful afternoon, and a walk is calculated to do one good, you know."

"Very true. Now, if I had known I should fall in with you, I should have walked also."

"Then you would n't have overtaken me."

"Neither would I! Now, that 's a puzzling kind of problem: if I ride, I overtake you, and wish I had walked; and if I walk, I do n't overtake you, and wish I had ridden. I can't make it out at all. I cannot see by what means we might have chanced together to-day, both on foot; unless, indeed, I had started first, and—and then you would not have overtaken me without you had come on horseback. Oh, dear!— But say, Phil, suppose you get on my horse and ride awhile."

"No, no; keep your seat," replied Philip. "I would as lief walk. Thank you for the kind offer, however. If you are not in a hurry, you might ride slowly, that I can keep with you."

"Certainly. I am in no hurry. I am glad to have your company to the mountain. A-hem! So, you concluded to take a walk this fine afternoon? Ah, Phil, you rogue, you are going a courting! You know you are!"

"I might venture to prefer the same charge against you,"

returned Philip. "This dressing-up business, in the middle of the week, looks suspicious. I would be far from astonished, Ned, if a certain young lady's name should become Mrs. Stanton before twenty-four hours."

"Nonsense! Ha, ha! You'll know before twenty-four hours whether it does or not! But it would n t astonish me if a certain other young lady's name should become Mrs. Kirke before—ay, before twenty-four hours," said Ned, by way of counter-sally.

"Ha, ha! you 'll know in twenty-four hours whether or not," returned Philip, by way of a counter-retort.

Other topics were introduced, and the verbose Ned got into the way of "telling one," to which Philip listened attentively, and which lasted nearly all the way to the mountain. He spoke in his usual precipitate manner, and the words dropped from his tongue so fast that if the story he related were written, it might be very appropriately written in a *running* hand; and it contained so few full stops that the most long-winded compositor might well hesitate to "set it up."

And thus, for the last time, did the honest farmer associate with the secret robber.

* * * * * * * *

"Mary, why are you so low-spirited of late?" asked Tilly, on the same afternoon.

"Am I?" Mary returned; but she knew she was.

"Yes. I have not seen you smile since your illness; and in your sleep—"

"What?"

"In your sleep you moan and talk of horrid things."

"Of horrid things? What horrid things?"

"Of murders, of robberies, of treachery, of false love—"

"Oh, no!"

"But you do."

"I was not aware of it, then."

"How should you be aware of it? for when one talks in

one's sleep, one is seldom awake, and, therefore, don't know it."

Mary was silent.

"Is it your illness that has left you so desponding? If so, cheer up. The delightful sunshine and pure air of these spring days should, indeed, not only cure the ills of the body, but should also arouse to active life the sinking spirits If you have anything on your mind, tell it to me, and—"

"I have not, though—nothing particular."

"Then what is the cause of your depression of spirits? Do you love Philip, and is your love not returned? It cannot be that; for I know he loves you dearly; I can see it in his every act; in every word he speaks to you, and in every look he gives you."

"Oh, no doubt he does—I am sure he does! I—I—am sure of it!"

"And surely he has recovered from his accident. You need have no fear for his welfare."

"I know that."

"Then why are you so sad? There must be some cause for it."

"I did not know I was," Mary replied; but her very tone conflicted with her words.

"How can you help knowing it? You have not smiled—scarcely spoken—since the night of the sleigh-ride—"

"Oh, that terrible night!" Mary shuddered.

"No, you have not once spoken save when spoken to. Your late manner so contrasts with your usual cheerfulness, that any one could not help noticing it. I have noticed it all the time; Aunt Eliza has remarked it; and—and—even father," concluded Tilly, who regarded the latter fact as little less than a prodigy.

"It must be because I have been so ill."

"Then you should try to cheer up. You are certainly almost well now. You should walk out in the fields, and woods, and mountains, and take plenty of exercise this

delightful weather. Come! The sun is yet several hours high—let us take a ramble somewhere. Will you go?"

"I don't care," Mary replied, mechanically.

"Suppose we go up to the White Rocks, suggested Tilly. We can take your telescope with us, and have a view of the delightful country. Do you feel like walking so far?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Then, shall I tell Aunt Eliza that we are going?"

"Yes, if you like." Mary was passive, rather than concurrent.

Finding Aunt Eliza, Tilly somewhat astonished her, by informing her that Mary and herself were about to take a walk.

"Is it possible?" she exclaimed. "I am glad Mary is reviving."

"I do not know that she is. I have almost forced her to consent to a walk to the White Rocks."

"What *can* be the matter with her, of late?" queried Aunt Eliza.

"I cannot imagine. I will urge her to confide in me while we are walking."

"Do so. If she has anything on her mind, it would certainly relieve her to disclose it to some one."

Tilly returned to Mary, whom she found still sitting abstractedly, as she left her.

"Are you ready?" Tilly asked.

"Yes," was the brief reply.

"But where is your bonnet?"

"Oh, sure enough!"

Mary arose languidly, took up her bonnet, and, accompanied by Tilly, walked out, carrying it dangling by the strings.

"Why do you not put your bonnet on?" queried Tilly.

Mary placed it upon her head.

"It is a lovely afternoon," observed Tilly, as they walked down the path.

"Yes, delightful. Oh, beautiful!" Mary returned; but still with a strange, absent manner.

"How pretty those clouds look!" Tilly went on, wishing to enlist Mary's interest in the surrounding beauties, and draw her attention for awhile from the latent sorrow which was manifestly preying upon her mind.

"Oh, they *are* pretty!" Mary returned, with a sudden enthusiasm that was almost child-like. "They make me think that heaven itself cannot be far away!"

They *were* beautiful. They were some fleecy clouds that were quietly bathing in the gentle floods of light which the declining sun exhaled. In places they were dark, or rather shadowy; while here and there they were so thin, that the sunlight, struggling through, painted bright, silvery spots upon them. Their edges, too, floating as 't were upon the very surface of the sunshine, took such softly radiant hues, that they might be appropriately compared to the spotless fleeces of lambs to which happy spirits have been likened.

Mary and her cousin had unconsciously stopped at the gate, and they stood there for a few minutes, wrapped up in the transient loveliness of the evening sky.

"I would like to go up there," said Mary, who was rather lost than wrapped up in the gentle clouds: and, in the contemplation of such an apparently celestial visit, she forgot the projected stroll upon the mountain, till her truant mind was recalled by her cousin.

"Let us walk on, Mary."

Reluctantly Mary withdrew her eyes from the beautiful object, and turned, with her cousin, toward the mountain. The tall hills, with their old rocks and tangled foliage, looked almost dull now; so surpassingly beautiful the picture she had just gazed upon—that inimitable picture, with its groundwork of soft blue.

They were soon ascending the uneven path: and in the deep shades which the thick trees strewed along the way, Mary even grew more silent and depressed.

"Mary," said Tilly, "any burden sits more easily upon two than upon one."

Mary remained silent.

"And a harrowing secret, of all other burdens," continued Tilly.

Mary did not reply, but walked slowly on, with downcast eyes.

"Now, Mary," her cousin went on, "tell me what you have on your mind that so saddens you? for, that you have something, I am sure."

"Oh! do not question me now: I will soon be better, I know."

"And do you promise to tell me soon what has cast such a gloom over you?"

"Yes, ere long you shall know it."

They walked slowly and quietly up the mountain path, and when they were nearly half-way to the White Rocks, sat down upon a smooth, bench-like rock, to rest.

"Oh!" exclaimed Tilly, abruptly, "what do you think?"

Almost a faint smile was visible on Mary's lips, as she replied, in substance, that she did n't know what to think; but it soon disappeared—that ghost of a smile—and the closed mouth resumed the old expression of quiet sadness.

"Why, we forgot the telescope!" Tilly exclaimed.

"Did we?"

"Yes; unless you have brought it. Have you?"

Mary had not brought it.

"Shall I go back after it?" asked Tilly.

"Oh! never mind."

"But I should so much like that we should have it with us," persisted Tilly. "Would you be afraid to remain here till I go back and get it?"

"No, I would not be afraid."

"Then I will go. I will be back in half-an-hour, or three-quarters."

"Very well."

Tilly went tripping gayly down the mountain path. Instinctively, as it were, the eyes of Mary followed her cousin. till her form descended deep among the jutting rocks and wild shrubbery, and was lost to view; then Mary was alone—alone. She had looked, for the last time, upon the yet sprightly figure of her cousin. When, after the dinner hour at the farm-house that day, she had watched the rough form of her honest uncle, moving out into the fields, to resume the usual labors, she had seen him for the last time upon the earth. When, on leaving the farm-house half-an-hour ago, in company with her cousin, she had seen her father's sister (who had come to the door to see them off)—good old Aunt Eliza, who, whatever her peculiarities, had never been other than kind to her—she had seen her to see her no more in the material world. She had left the old farm-house, too—which she had grown to love as a home, and where she had spent some quiet, happy days—she had left it to return not again. On the night of the April sleighing-party, she had heard the songs, the witty remarks and keen retorts, the jests, the laughter and merriment of assembled youth, for the last time!

Quietly she sat upon the rustic seat, among the wilds of the mountain, waiting her cousin's return;—still calm and motionless, as if instinctively reconciled to the fate which she little imagined awaited her now. Deeper and deeper she sunk into mental gloom that far surpassed mere sadness: and yet she could not have wept, though worlds had rewarded every tear! Languid both in mind and body, oblivious to all around her, she might have sat in listless reverie till the curtains of night had fallen upon the mountain, and the dark shades gathered about her, had no one come near. She did not tremble: her nerves seemed sluggish, as it were. her mind itself was quiet—unnaturally quiet—but sunk in such a strange gloom.

She noted not the time as it went by—she seemed to have passed prematurely beyond the pale within which time is measured—and it might have been, for all she knew, a dozen

minutes or as many hours after Tilly left her to go for the telescope, when the sound of a footstep coming up the path broke the solitude of the place—a footstep that was not her cousin's.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THAT CRISIS.

When Tilly returned to the farm-house, she found in the sitting-room Philip Kirke and (oh, what a leap her heart gave!) Ned Stanton. They had just arrived, had been coldly, but politely received by Aunt Eliza, and had not yet inquired after the "young ladies." When Tilly entered, Aunt Eliza, feeling that her presence was not absolutely indispensable, and that she would, moreover, be happier and more at ease anywhere else than in the presence of *men*, withdrew—not even taking time to ask Tilly why she had returned, and where she had left Mary.

"How do you do, Tilly?" said Philip, arising, and shaking her hand cordially.

"Right well, thank you. *You* look well."

"I *am* quite well," Philip rejoined.

"I am glad," said Ned, "to see you looking so well—to-day." And he took her hand, and gave it just the ghost of a squeeze.

Tilly blushed, and hoped that Ned was quite well; and he assured her that he had not felt so well as now for many years. Tilly was delighted to hear this, for if the health of Ned (who had scarcely ever seen other than the best of health) was better now than usual, it must be prodigious.

"Where is Mary?" Philip could not help asking—casually, to be sure.

"Oh?" laughed Tilly, "I *thought* you would inquire for her soon! Now could you guess where she is?"

Upon his word, Philip could not.

"She is sitting alone on a big rock, about a mile up the mountain," said Tilly.

"What--what is she doing there?"

"Why she and I started for a visit to the White Rocks, with a view to taking a survey of the country; and when we had traveled half the distance we discovered that we had forgotten the telescope—that one you gave her, you know—and I induced her to remain there till I should come back and get it."

"And is that what brought you back?"

"Yes."

"Then give it to me, and I will take it up to her. I can get there sooner than you."

"I will."

Tilly withdrew, and in a few minutes returned with the article.

"I will go up at once," said Philip, "taking the telescope and rising. "Will you two go along now, or come at your leisure?"

Ned looked at Tilly.

Tilly looked at Ned.

"Why," returned Ned, "as I feel—well, not just to say tired—but then—a little—"

"Very well," interrupted Philip, "as Mary is alone, I will hasten up. You will come in a little while, I suppose."

"Ye—yes."

"I hope your society will cheer Mary's dull spirits," observed Tilly, as Philip was about to depart. "She has been rather gloomy to-day."

"Has she?"

"Yes, a little that way."

"I—I—wonder," said Philip, "what might be the cause; can you imagine?"

"No; though I rather think she is not rightly recovered from her illness yet. To-day, for the first time since you both got hurt that night, I induced her to walk out. I think she will revive speedily after this."

"I hope so," returned Philip, as he strode toward the gate, leaving Ned and Tilly alone.

"Shall we walk up the mountain at once?" asked Ned. "Though," he added, "I suppose *you* feel a little tired, and—"

"I do not care about going now," Tilly returned, "unless you really wish it."

"Oh, I do not wish it," Ned replied. "I suppose there is plenty of time; we can go in a quarter of an hour or so."

"Well."

"Or, indeed," Ned continued, "if we don't go at all we will just feel as well; and they will be safe without us, unless you really wish to visit the White Rocks; in that case—"

"Oh, I do not care about going at all," interrupted Tilly. "I only started for the purpose of getting Mary to go and take a little exercise, which she stands in need of. Now, Philip has gone up, and he is all the company she wants. But, then, perhaps you really feel like taking a little walk, and—"

"Oh, no; not at all!" put in Ned. "Indeed, although I rode to-day, I feel as tired as though I had walked. Because, you see, I rode slowly, so that Phil might keep up with me—he walked, and I fell in with him about three miles back—and I was thus as long sitting on my horse as I would have been walking the same distance; and it is very tiresome work to sit in a saddle for an hour or two, and keep drawing the rein with all one's strength to keep one's horse from going too fast; for my horse is such a goer that his slowest gait, if let alone, amounts to a brisk trot of a mile every three or

four minutes. Then, besides—would you please be so kind as to get me a drink of water?"

"Oh, certainly!" And Tilly fairly sprang from the room to procure the "Adam's ale" requisite to quench her lover's seeming thirst.

"Now for it," muttered Ned, in a low tone, that had a decidedly theatrical ring; and, glancing hastily about, to assure himself that no mortal eye noted his actions, he drew from his side coat-pocket an article which he held to his lips with singular tenacity for—well, say eighteen seconds; after which he returned it to his pocket.

Without making a mystery of this incident, we will merely state that the article was a half-pint flask, whose contents were half-a-pint of "the best." It was full when he raised it to his mouth—empty when he restored it to his pocket. It way be as well to state, too, that the sending for the water was an elaborate finesse, resorted to by Ned in order that he might be left alone with the precious stuff for a moment. He had brought it with him on purpose to nerve him for a particular trial, intending to "take" it on approaching the house; but his happening to fall in with Philip had "knocked that arrangement higher than a kite."

"That," he murmured, after returning the empty flask to his pocket, "that will steady my nerves for the work before me. Oh, heart, be flint! be steel! be ice!—so far from softening! so far from faltering! so far from warming! Let no artful smile turn thee from thy purpose! Let thy motto be, 'Remember Dick!' Dost dread to wring her heart? 'Remember Dick!' She wrung his heart and smiled! Shall I, then, shrink from the stern duty of inflicting upon her the same punishment which she wilfully and causelessly inflicted on my friend? No! not while reason holds her seat in this head of mine, and while I have recollection to—'Remember Dick!' But, hark! there comes the water."

"I went clear to the spring for it," said Tilly, entering

with a tin cup full of the delicious beverage, "in order to get it cool."

"Thank you." And Ned took the cup from her hand—it held a little over a pint—and drank all the water with apparent relish; and that was something he did not often do.

"Have some more?" [There is no doubt that this very question was asked by the first person who ever gave another a drink of water, and it has been repeated on every like occasion down to the present day.]

"Have some more?"

Ned shuddered as he replied, "No, thank you! Oh, no!"

"It's no trouble at all; if you like—"

"Oh, no! Thank you! I do not wish any more, really!" Ned replied, startled at the very thought of drinking any more *water*.

Tilly returned to the kitchen to replace the cup, while Ned muttered, in a tone of self-reproach:

"She is very kind, too."

"It is quite pleasant to-day," observed Tilly, returning to the sitting room.

"Yes, very. It is *very* pleasant. It is, indeed, *quite* pleasant," returned Ned, for the first time in his life resorting to repetition for want of words.

Tilly said, "It is so." Then neither spoke for nearly half a minute, when Ned asked (by the way, merely) where was Aunt Eliza? He had not seen her since he came in. Nothing could have happened her; she could not have fallen in the spring, or—

"Oh, no!" returned Tilly, setting his fears aside. "She is at the dairy, busy at work of some kind. Aunt is never satisfied unless at work, setting things to rights, or something or other."

"I *know* she is very industrious."

"She certainly is."

"So is your father. Now, I'll venture he is out in the field, working away—"

"Yes, he is busy in one of the cornfields."

"I suppose so," rejoined Ned. "I just finished planting my corn last Saturday."

"Father is nearly done, too. He will finish this week."

"He has done well."

"Yes, he has had some help until the latter part of last week, when he concluded he could easily finish the work himself."

"He 's a vigorous man for his age."

"Yes."

A silence now ensued, lasting all of a quarter of a minute; when Ned somewhat astonished Tilly by observing, at this late juncture, that he hoped she had been quite well since he had last seen her.

"Yes; oh, yes. Quite well," returned Tilly. "Why, I do not—" she continued, half alarmed at the thought—"I do not look—"

"Oh, no; you do not look—" Ned was really scarce of words.

A little further conversation ensued; and, by and by, the contents of that flask began to crawl up into his head, and especially to take refuge in his tongue—and Ned was himself again.

"Yes, the fact is," said Ned, the conversation having spontaneously turned upon himself, "the fact is, I was just precisely twenty-six years old last Thursday morning, at twenty-one minutes past eight, and it strikes me I am growing old—"

"Oh, no."

"—And as I look back, through the long list of intervening years, to the time when I was a boy—when we were children together—"

Tilly sighed, audibly.

"—As I look back to that time, I cannot help thinking how I have thrown away the precious hours, and how worthless I am—"

"Oh, no."

"—to what I might have been; and I wish I had either the time to live over, or that I had never been born—"

"Oh, no," interrupted Tilly, visibly affected.

"Yes, I have been wild, careless and indolent all my life; but I am determined that henceforth—"

Tilly brightened.

"I will—no, I will not, either. I cannot—"

"Oh, yes you can," urged Tilly.

"No, I cannot abandon my reckless, almost dissipated, habits,

'For as the twig is bent the tree inclines;'

and having, in despite of the admonitions of a kind father and mother, allowed myself to bend when a twig, I am doomed to be a crooked tree till I am cut down, which," he added, growing almost melancholy, "may not be many years, or even months, and—"

"Oh, don't say that!"

"—this life's miseries and wrong-goings will end."

Ned stopped for breath, drew in a whole chest full, then relaxed every muscle and allowed it to escape spontaneously through his open mouth, which it did with such impetuosity that his cheeks were puffed out for a moment so prodigiously, and seemed to endure such a strain, that the sensitive Tilly half expected to see at least one of them fly off. They remained firm, however, and Ned suddenly said—"Oh, Tilly!" and stopped.

Tilly waited for him to proceed.

"Why," he said, "are you sure your aunt is at the dairy?"

"Yes; but I'll look and see."

And she looked and saw.

"And your father is in the field?"

Tilly assured him that her father was in the field, and asked him if he felt ill, and had she better run down for Aunt Eliza? or—

"Oh, no!"

Or for Ina?

"Oh, no!"

Or get him a drink of water?

"Oh, no!" he almost screamed. "I am not well—sick, I mean; I am very well—*very*. I am very well, Tilly. Oh, unusually well. I feel, in fact, *very* well."

"I feared you were growing suddenly ill," said Tilly, "and no one in the house; no assistance—"

"Oh, not at all!"

"I am so much relieved!"

Ned was n't.

"Tilly," he said, presently.

Tilly asked him, "What?"

"I am one of the most miserable of men!" he said, with some feeling.

She was very sorry to hear him say so; but hoped he was n't, indeed.

"Yes I am!" he persisted. "Oh, that I might have died when—when—" He could n't say when.

Tilly replied that she would have been very sorry; oh, *so* sorry! if he had died when—

"Oh, Tilly! you do not know—"

Tilly did not say whether she did or not; but she rather thought she *did*.

"I am a miserable, wretched, ugly—"

"Oh, no!"

"—being! No one cares for me, and—"

"Oh, yes!"

"—I feel alone in the world. I feel that I am no longer fit to live—"

Oh, but he was, though.

"—and that a watery grave—"

"Oh, do not!"

And he did not.

All of three minutes elapsed, during which both were silent. Ned did not speak, and Tilly *could not*. There they

sat, now and then stealing awkward glances at each other. At length Ned whispered to himself, "THE TIME IS COME!" and immediately made a spring toward Tilly, who sat across the room from him, and who at once jumped to the conclusion that he was mad, or very much in love. Throwing himself wildly at her feet, with such force that the whole house trembled, he seized one of her hands, kissed it with apparent fervor twelve or thirteen times; then, in a style, in a tone, in words, and in a generally-impressive manner, for all of which many a true lover would give worlds at the trying moment, he unbosomed his woes.

"Tilly! Tilly!" he exclaimed. "Angel! Bright spirit! Sun of my day! star of my night! light of my existence! Noblest, purest, loveliest, holiest of beings! Ornament of your sex! I love you! I love you to madness! I adore you! I worship you! The ground on which you walk is sanctified in my eyes! The air you breathe is to me as a whisper from the happy world! I reverence the house you live in! I bow to the hills and mountains that afford you a rambling-place! And to yourself—I am not even worthy to fall on my face! But here, on my bended knee, I beg you to forgive me for having even dared to tell you of my love! I know I can ask no more than that! I know I cannot ask you to be mine! You are too good, too pure, too lovely, for me to dare to hope that you would ever mar your shining life by uniting with such a wretch—such a worthless wretch as I! Forgive me! Oh, forgive me! Farewell! farewell! May you be happy forever! Farewell! The world to me is darkness now! Soon the calm waters of the Monongahela shall cover up and hide alike my sins and sorrows! Farewell! Oh, farewell!" And leaving Tilly amazed beyond expression, he sprang up like mad, seized his hat, made such a rush for the door as a frightened cat might make, leaped out upon the lawn, and came in terrific contact with a strong man who was just approaching the door; and both fell headlong to the ground, and rolled over and over upon the grass.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE SHADOW.

THE reader will remember that on the evening of Ned Stanton's terrible affright in the graveyard, Philip Kirke, who chanced to be passing, and who did not comprehend the affair at all, crouched, on the impulse of a guilty conscience, among the bushes at the road-side—preceded, however, by another, who had chanced that way but a few seconds in advance of him. That mysterious figure was no other than George Roland. George heard the terrified exclamation of Philip, which was, in substance, a spontaneous query, addressed to no one in particular (save his conscience, perhaps), calling for information as to whether the apparition in the churchyard was the ghost of Henry White come back to judge him,—and having heard this singular ejaculation, he could not easily dismiss it from his mind.

Why should the ghost of Henry White return to this world to judge Philip Kirke? George asked himself. Had Philip ever wronged him in their dealings? Scarcely probable, George thought; for had Philip ever wronged him to such an extent as to render it probable that his ghost should return to set it right, it would have been known in the settlement long ere this. Besides, George had never heard any one speak of Philip Kirke as a man of business, save to say that he was honest and upright. Certain it was that he could never have cheated Henry White to any great extent without the knowledge of the latter, who, though straight-forward and honest, was always a thorough business man. What, then, could be the import of these strange words? The ghost of Henry White come back to judge Philip Kirke?

Why, no one, at that time, was yet quite sure that he was dead! Ha! Who murdered Henry White? Where was Philip Kirke at the time? Had he not suddenly left the village only a few days before Henry White was expected to return from Pittsburg? and had he not remained away for several months? Was he not probably aware that Henry White expected to carry a sum of money with him from Pittsburg? Could it be possible that Philip had waylaid and murdered him? Philip was a comparative stranger in the settlement: who knew anything of his real character? And yet—oh, no! he had never liked Philip Kirke, but he *could not* believe that he was a murderer!—that he was the murderer of Mary's father, and he her lover! Still he determined to watch him till he should either find more ground for suspicion, or see something to dispel that he had already conceived.

So, George returned to his home without visiting the village; and thenceforth he was continually pondering on what he had heard; now coming to the conclusion that the idea of Philip's being guilty of such a crime was positively ridiculous; then again falling into a maze over the words he had heard him utter, and remaining for awhile almost convinced that they were inexplicable, save on the ground that Philip had, at least, been a party to the murder of Henry White.

Several days elapsed before a thought of Philip's possible complicity with the robbers of the vicinity occurred to George; then it did occur—and with a vengeance. At first, the recollection that he was the first man robbed by the mysterious banditti, almost set the idea aside; but then another thought occurred to him which increased his suspicions ten-fold. It was this: How remarkable that Philip should chance to be the first man robbed! Might not this have been a concerted thing, intended to avert suspicion from him at the very start? How remarkable, too, that the robbers made their appearance so nearly the time of his arrival at Weston! Did not this

look as though he might have established himself at the village to act in concert with the other robbers? Might he not hold intercourse with them almost every day?

Another thing: Several times had persons of the settlement been waylaid and robbed while in company with Philip, and always when both were supposed to have considerable money about them! And how remarkable that on such occasions he was generally felled to the ground, almost senseless, and yet always escaped with but slight apparent injury, while his companion usually caught such a blow as almost to endanger his life!

These and other suspicious circumstances increased George's mistrust of his rival, until it almost amounted to conviction. He durst not mention his suspicions to any one, even had he desired; for in that event he would have been hooted for entertaining such an absurd thought, and held up to public ridicule, so thoroughly satisfied was every one of Kirke's uncompromising integrity. Besides, to have made his suspicions patent, would have put Philip on his guard, or perhaps induced him to make his escape. No matter: George did not wish to confide to any one what was on his mind. He resolved to watch his rival secretly thenceforth, until able to produce most incontrovertible evidence of his criminality.

On the very day Philip visited the rendezvous of the robbers to plot with them for the murder of John Duffey and his own hated enemy, as they should return from the race at New Market, George chanced to visit the house of Daniel Patton, on some trivial business: and, returning, was walking slowly by the wood through which lay the desultory way to the cave, when he saw Philip Kirke coming through the wood from the direction of the river. He was walking rather swiftly, and with a step in which it was not difficult to detect a certain amount of stealth. The road lay along the margin of the wood, and there was no fence between them. George immediately sprang into the midst of a thick clump of bushes,

convinced that Philip had not observed him, and quietly noted the movements of the latter.

On reaching the road, he cast uneasy glances in both directions, and even into the field beyond, after which, apparently satisfied that the coast was clear, he walked swiftly toward Weston. George remained in his place of concealment till he had disappeared in the distance; and then, convinced by what he had seen of him, that he had come from Weston on some evil errand, he resolved to scour the woods in the hope of finding some trace of the robbers, with whom he had very little doubt his rival held intercourse. So, he searched the woods from the road to the river, and some distance on the right and left, keeping himself concealed as much as possible, and at times even crawling among the bushes, but all in vain; he found no mark of the presence of a human being. A squirrel crossed his path now and then, and occasionally a frightened rabbit started up from its nest and ran away: but nothing else disturbed the solitude of the forest. At last he gave up the search, and returned home, convinced that if Philip had came out to communicate with the robbers, their lurking-place must be beyond the river, and signals had been used—or, perhaps, a boat, which they might have in their possession.

Even now, it would occasionally occur to George that he was "making a fool of himself," to use his own expression—that his suspicions were too absurd to be thought of; and he even went so far as to fear that his mind was a little deranged, in consequence of having received, from one he so much loved, a certain homely covering for the hand. He even wondered, in case there were grounds for his fears regarding his mind, what length of time would elapse ere he should become a raving madman and be sent to the lunatic asylum; and whether in that case, his mental derangement would be pronounced incurable. Altogether, when he reached home, he found himself rather deeper in a maze, regarding the all-

absorbing question which had taken possession of his mind, than ever before.

On the following night, when George saw Philip shoot the robber, whom they had captured and brought to Weston,—the unfortunate Buster,—he was undecided whether to regard that fact as new grounds for suspicion, or as a total dispeller of all he had ever entertained. But when the pocket-knife, marked P. KIRKE, was found upon the person of the dead robber, he would have staked his life on his convictions—which remained thenceforth unmoved. He could easily see why he had shot the robber; for was not the latter on the point of disclosing who his associates were, and where they stayed, when shot down!

After this, George frequently hung upon Philip's tracks for a whole day at a time; but as the latter did not visit the cave more than once or twice during the whole winter, he made no new discoveries.

Thus matters went on till the twelfth day of May, just two years after the death of Henry White. On that day, George again started to visit the house of Daniel Patton, on some matter of business; and, as he usually did when the weather was pleasant and he had but a few miles to go, went a-foot. Walking rather swiftly, he had arrived within a mile of his destination, when he descried, a few hundred yards in advance of him, another traveler—a pedestrian like himself—walking at a moderate pace in the same direction. The man did not look round, and George was hastening to overtake him in order to have company during the remainder of his way, when he suddenly conceived the idea that the gentleman ahead was no other than Philip Kirke. This thought no sooner occurred to him than he sprang into the woods on his left, and followed cautiously, stepping quickly from one bush or tree on to another, in order that the traveler, in case of his looking behind, should not see him. At length the traveler stopped, turned about, scanned the road he had just passed over, then looked ahead, then into the woods, then

into the fields; and finally, no doubt satisfied that he was not observed, plunged into the depths of the woods, and hurried toward the river. George fully recognized him: it was *Philip Kirke.*

"At last! At last!" he exclaimed; and, striking diagonally through the woods, he followed Philip, keeping him constantly in view, till the latter reached the bluff overlooking the river, and disappeared over the verge.

Hastening onward, though still with caution, George was soon at the brink himself, and at the very spot where he had seen Kirke descend. He peeped cautiously over, but could see no one. Fearing that he might be observed, he crouched among some bushes that grew in clumps along the edge of the bluff; and there remained for a full half-hour, carefully scanning the vicinity, and especially the river, across which he half expected to see a boat glide, with Philip as a passenger. He was afraid to move, lest the home of the robbers—he did not doubt now that the object of Philip's errand there was to see them—might be down among the rocks within a few feet of him, and they should see or hear him. At last, however, he caught the sound of voices, and, looking down, he saw Kirke emerge, like a very serpent, from some obvious aperture in the side of the bluff, and stand upon a narrow shelving rock. Immediately four other ruffianly-looking fellows followed; and after a few words of parting, which George could not make out, Philip began to ascend. George arose, and sprang away like a deer, soon reaching some thick sumac bushes, fifty paces distant, which afforded a most excellent hiding-place. Here he concealed himself, to take note of the villain's further movements. He had not been there long ere a head and pair of shoulders appeared above the top of the bluff, where they remained for a moment; then the whole form followed; and Philip Kirke, apparently not quite at ease, though certainly not dreaming of the eye that was upon him, stalked away toward the distant road, and was soon lost to view among the intricacies of the woods.

When satisfied that he had passed beyond sight, George again drew near the verge of the bluff, and peeped cautiously over. No one was to be seen, Bill and his companions having re-entered the cave. He recognized the shelving rock, however, on which he had seen the outlaws stand, and he resolved to make his way to it, confident that, among the vines that hung profusely about, there was an orifice in the side of the bluff, leading to a cavern. It was impossible for him to determine whether that cave was a deep one, or not. It might wind its way into the hill half-a-mile, or so; or, it might only be of the dimensions of an ordinary house. In the latter case, he felt that it would be incumbent upon him to proceed as noiselessly as possible, which he accordingly did. As he descended to within a few feet of the shelf, he distinctly heard the sound of voices coming from the den, and he fully realized how perilous his situation was. Moving carefully to the left, then descending a little way, he reached a point where the shelf terminated among some thick vines and bushes that clung to the side of the bluff. Here the descent was very steep, and, but for a jutting rock that barely afforded him a seat, and the ample bushes to which he could cling, he could not long have maintained his position. He now heard the voices within the cave more distinctly than before, yet could not distinguish a word that was said. He soon heard enough, though, to convince him that the robbers were drinking, if not carousing; for he several times heard harsh bursts of half-suppressed laughter, and now and then the rattle of a tin cup. He could not still see the mouth of the cave, the vines so completely concealed it; but he was able to judge pretty nearly where it was located: and he was just discussing with himself the probable amount of risk he should incur by crawling along the shelf to the opening, when the vines were thrust aside, rather nearer to him than he had supposed the mouth of the cave to be, and the four ruffians came out, one by one, and seated themselves upon the shelf. George came near uttering an exclamation of surprise, as he suddenly

recognized in one of them the very robber who had been twenty months previously, carried captive to Weston, by Duffey and Hempstead, and who had escaped from his place of confinement in Tony's house. He was not long, either, in making out a decided family resemblance between another of the outlaws (Buster) and the robber whom Philip Kirke had shot in Weston, the previous autumn. His whole attention, however, was soon absorbed in their conversation. He was within a very few yards of them, and could hear every word, although he had so drawn the foliage about him, when they emerged from the cave, that it was next to impossible they could discover his presence, so long as he should remain quiet. It was evident they had been drinking while Philip was with them, and that they were now "keeping it up;" for their faces were flushed, their eyes heavy and dull, their tongues thick, and their language broken. For a little while he could make nothing out of what they said; but finally one who had lain down, and was apparently half-asleep, made some remark about the mildness of the weather.

"Yes," said Bill, "the cap'n 'll have a nice day for his weddin', to-morrer."

One of the others laughed outright; he could n't help it.

"What'r yer laughin' at?" queried Bill, with an oath.

"Oh, it 's sich a darned high move!" returned the other, and laughed more.

"*Wha's* a darn high move?" asked Bill.

"This weddin' biz'ness," replied the other. "The idea o' the cap'n a-morryin' what 's-his-namey's dotter—"

"Ole Whitey's?" suggested Bill.

"Yes—after him a-helpin' to smash ole Whitey's head, an a-helpin' to git his money, an' a-helpin' to shove him under the ground—the idea of him a-takin' an' morryin' the same feller's dotter—oh, it's enough to bu'st a feller with thinkin' on!" And he laughed till there *was* apparent danger of his *bust*-ing.

"Well, what o' that?" asked Bill.

"Nothin'—only the idea—an' precisely two year after—"

"An' a day," put in Bill, correcting him. "It was jis to-day two year ago—or to-night, ruther—that ole Whitey 'spired in this very diggins, an' the weddin', you know, ain't to be till to-morrer. An'," added Bill, half musingly, "nobuddy knows nothin' of it but their two selves."

"An' us," put in another.

"Yes, us; but even us knowed nothin' of it till to-day. Phil never tole us nothin' of it afore."

"He might a axed us to the weddin'," suggested one of the others, with an injured air.

"Oh! but he's a-goin' to have a quiet weddin' of it; nobuddy's to be there but the—what-ye-call-him—preacher, to tie the knot. He said he was a-goin' straight to where the gal lives, as soon as he left here, so's to make all the 'rangements."

"Wonder if we could n't all do like the cap'n?" observed one who had not yet spoken. "One at a time, in course—go to Weston an' call ourselves respect'l dealers in grain, an' put up at—at—Bony Bate's—or what's-'is-name—the tavern, you know—an' fall in love with purty gals, an' all that?"

"Guess not," returned Bill. "We ain't so good-lookin' as Cap'n Phil—we ain't."

"So we ain't, neither," said the other; "an' I s'pose we 'll have to live an' die ole maids."

"You mean bach'lors, you darn fool," said the illiberal Bill.

"Sompin' o' that sort."

George thought he had heard quite enough now, and began to wish that the outlaws would return to the interior of the cave, that he might withdraw; for, to attempt to do so while they were there, would be almost certain to lead to his discovery; but they manifested no inclination to change their position, and a new topic of conversation was introduced by and by.

"The cap'n," said Bill, "says as he 'll give us the wery

fust chance to 'tend to them fellers—Duffey an'--what 's the tothern's name?"

"*Roland*," responded one of the outlaws.

"Yes—Roland. Won't he be took when he hears of the gal he was after fur hisself a-gittin' morried to Cap'n Phil?"

"Oh, gosh! won't he?"

"*I* think," observed Bill, "we ort to pay off them other'ns, too, fur interferin' that night we *was* at it—them that took poor Buster—your brother, Bust."

"Yes, we ort to guzzle the whole crowd."

"Plenty o' time to 'tend to 'em all, though; they'll never find us hur—an' we can hant 'em as long as we please."

"An' we'll do it."

After a little further conversation, which disclosed some alarming secrets to the excited listener, all returned to the cave, for the purpose of taking a little additional refreshment, in the shape of their favorite beverage. No sooner had the last one entered, and adjusted the vines carefully before the entrance, than George left his irksome position, and began carefully to ascend the bluff. When he had reached the top, he took a careful survey of the vicinity, noting many land-marks, to make sure that he could easily find the place again; then he struck off toward the road, as fast as his feet could carry him. No matter what obstacle came in his way—a rock, a fallen tree, or anything of that sort—he sprang over it like a deer. In ten minutes he had reached the road. Here he paused for a moment, undecided as to what course it would be best to pursue. He soon concluded to go straight to the justice of the peace—a Mr. Smith—state on oath the startling facts which had come to his knowledge, get a warrant for the arrest of Philip Kirke, take it to the constable—a Mr. Jones—and accompany the latter at once to Ira Tate's, whither Philip had gone, and assist, if necessary, to arrest him. He hoped that much time would not thus be lost, as both magistrate and constable resided on the mountain road, between the cross-roads and Ira Tate's home.

When he reached the house of the justice, he found him at home, and at once deposed to what he had seen, to the utter amazement and astonishment of the "squire;" who, however, "issued" the warrant directing the constable to arrest Philip Kirke and bring the same before him, the justice of the peace, dead or alive, (meaning Philip); and authorizing him (the constable) to call upon all good citizens to assist in executing that warrant.

George found constable Jones at home, and delivered the warrant into his hands; and when the latter had partially recovered from his astonishment—a matter of fifteen minutes after having the state of affairs explained to him—he armed himself with two pocket-pistols and an ordinary butcher-knife; and the two set off for Ira Tate's; George having inferred from the conversation that he had gone directly thither, and Mr. Jones himself having seen him pass an hour previously, accompanied by Ned Stanton.

They were not long in reaching Ira Tate's, and were walking quietly up the path, George in advance, when Ned Stanton came rushing from the door, as described in the preceding chapter, coming in collision with George, and upsetting both precipitately on the lawn. It was so sudden, that the constable had not recognized Ned; and, very naturally supposing him to be Philip Kirke endeavoring to escape, "reached for him," seized him firmly by the coat collar with his left hand, and with his right held the muzzle of a pistol to his ear, at the same time exclaiming:

"Oh, you sneakin', thievin', murderin' highway-robbin' villain! I 've got you at last, have I?"

It might be inferred from the last exclamation, that he had been looking for him for some time.

Ned and George were now in the act of rising, when the latter recognized the former, and exclaimed:

"Why, that 's Ned Stanton!"

"So it is!" exclaimed Mr. Jones, releasing Ned, who was

all astonishment. "In another second I'd shot!" And he uncocked his pistol.

"What the deuse are you about, Ned?" asked George.

"What the deuse are *you* about?" returned Ned.

"I was just coming to Ira Tate's," said George.

"And I was just leaving," said Ned.

"In a hurry, too. But, say—where is Kirke?"

"Gone up to the White Rocks, with Mary."

"How long since?"

"I—I—can't tell. Half-an-hour, I suppose; or, may be, an hour. But why? What's the matter?"

"Ned, come here," said George. "Are your nerves strong?"

"If they were not they would never have stood the shock they just received," Ned returned.

"I am going to tell you something—and we want your assistance, if necessary, to arrest a very devil."

"Ha! What?"

"Ned, now don't scream, but listen: *Philip Kirke is a robber—a highwayman—a murderer!*"

"What? Why—you—as-ton-ish me!"

"He is at the head of a party of robbers and murderers who have, for some time infested our community: he set them to murder John Duffey and myself, last fall: the robber whom he shot in Weston was one of his own accomplices, and he shot him to prevent his exposing him: and, worst of all, *this same Kirke was one of the murderers of Henry White!*"

Ned was struck dumb with amazement.

"Come," said George, "let us go after him; if he escapes, justice is dead!"

The three hurried from the lawn, and were soon making their way with rapid steps, up the mountain, Ned going on foot with the others, leaving his horse standing at the gate.

Tilly had not distinguished a word of the conversation, having only come to the door in time to see the trio quit the lawn. She saw that something was the matter; but her own troubles soon recurred to her, and as she remembered that

Ned, on whom she had so set her heart, was lost to her, she exclaimed, in the anguish of her heart:

"My last hope is gone! I am desolate and alone! And—oh, dear me!—if I don't die young I'll be an old maid as long as I live!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

TOO LATE!

WERE we writing a work of fiction, we should never pen this chapter; but we are not, and the truth must be told.

Let us witness in imagination the fearful scene which the old gray rocks witnessed nearly three-score years ago; let us look upon the appalling picture as the tall cliffs would describe it to-day, could they speak.

We left Mary White in a lonely place on the mountain, awaiting the return of her cousin who had gone back to the house for that deplorable glass—left her just as she was startled from her reverie by an approaching footstep on the mountain path. There let us return to her again.

Mary lifts her eyes languidly, and they rest on the approaching form of—Philip Kirke. He is yet some paces distant, and is barely in view; for he has just turned a sharp angle of the crooked path, beyond which the way is concealed by projecting rocks and tangled foliage.

"Oh, Mary!" he exclaims, drawing hastily near, "I am so glad to find you safe and quiet! Yes, and looking much better than when I saw you last week! Were you not afraid to remain in this wild place alone?"

"No, I was not afraid," Mary replies, in a calm, melancholy tone.

"Well," resumes Philip, seating himself beside Mary, and imprinting a kiss on her pale cheek, "you need not have been afraid, I am sure."

"Why?" Mary asks, almost coldly.

"Because," replies Philip, "bad as the world is represented, I do not believe there is a creature in it—man or beast—so base and unfeeling as to harm one like you, dear Mary."

"Am I better than others?" she inquires, in a quiet, passionless tone.

"Better?" responds Philip. "Yes, better than *any* other, of this world, it seems to me! Better than any of your sex, and a thousand times better than any of mine! You are not like an ordinary woman! you are *not* an ordinary woman!"

"What then?"

"An angel!—or very like one."

"I wish I *were* one," Mary replies, in the same quiet tone.

"I am glad you are *not* a real angel," says Philip, "if to be one you would have to go from hence. True, *you* might be happier; but—oh! am I selfish?—the world would be to me so dark without you!"

Mary is silent. To-morrow is her wedding-day, and she is thinking of that. Will she, after all, marry her lover without first putting his character to test,—without first executing that simple *ruse* which she has almost determined to employ, to set her doubts at rest? Doubts? What doubts? Doubts of the integrity of her lover? Doubts as to whether he may not be a robber? Doubts as to whether he may not, indeed, be the murderer of her father? Oh, they *must* be foolish doubts! Why, how lovingly Philip has just spoken! Can *he* be a murderer?—and yet so sentimental and eloquent? Can *he* be the murderer of her own father?—and yet so full of manifest love for her? Oh, no! That his words of love are sincere, his very tone and manner attest; and were he a murderer, or anything half so bad, could he sincerely love any one? Could it be possible that one could murder an honest old

man, and love his victim's daughter? Oh, no! Such thing was never heard of!

Why, how fearfully she has wronged her noble lover, now that she comes to reflect properly on the subject! How she has wronged him by entertaining of him so dark a suspicion! —Mary silently muses. Oh, how little he dreams what dreadful things she has more than half suspected him of! Would he ever—*could* he ever forgive her, did he know it? He might: but could he ever be happy again if aware that she has thus soon regarded him with such fearful distrust? No, never! Oh, she *must* have misunderstood the words she had heard him utter in his ravings that terrible night! Her own head must have been a little deranged. Oh, that's it! Why has she not thought of that before? Henceforth, she will trust him. She will not dare to think again of what has so troubled her mind of late. No, she will confide in him most unreservedly. She will believe that her own ears heard falsely,—that her own senses were wandering,—that all the world are robbers and murderers, rather than him; she will believe anything—everything—but ill of him!—for she loves him.

Ah, woman's love!—devoted, steadfast, everlasting! but, oh, how blind!

"Mary, you are still silent and sad," observes Philip.

"I have not been well you know," she replies.

"But you are recovering?"

"Oh, yes."

"Shall we proceed to the White Rocks?—See: I have brought the telescope."

"Yes, if you wish."

"But do *you* feel like it?"

"Yes,—oh, yes!" Mary replies, quickly, as if awaking from a dream.

"If you are too weak—"

"Oh, I am not! We will go. Is Tilly not coming?"

"Why, you see, somebody that she thinks a deal of, and

that thinks a deal of her, arrived at the house with me but a moment before she came, and I took the glass and hurried up to you, leaving them to come at their leisure."

"Ned, is it?"

"Yes."

"Probably they will not come at all. We may as well proceed," says Mary.

They arise, and walk slowly up the path. Mary takes the arm of Philip, and her confidence in him becomes more and more firm as they ascend the mountain. Now and then she almost feels like throwing herself at his feet, and begging his forgiveness for having so wronged him in her secret thought: but she defers that.

"Mary," says Philip, while they walk leisurely up the winding path, "to-morrow, you know, is the day we appointed for our wedding. If you do not feel sufficiently recovered from your illness, it would be selfish and ungenerous of me to—to insist—"

"Oh, you are good and kind," Mary interrupts; "but I am much better now; I feel much better since starting from the house; I believe all I wanted was a little exercise. I will soon recover my usual health and spirits now."

Yes, for without any reason at all, her confidence in her lover has more than fully returned, without any reason—save that he *is* her lover.

"I am so glad to hear you say so," he returns. "I am glad to see you growing cheerful again. Why, I may almost hope to see you smile next."

"I feel so much better this afternoon, than I have felt lately," Mary responds, "that I *am* half inclined to smile." And she does smile faintly. "I do not know," she goes on, "what has so revived me, unless it is the mountain air."

"That is just it," Philip assures her. "The trouble is, you have too long deferred giving it a trial. Away with all doctors' medicines! The mountain air of May possesses far

more and far superior medical virtues, healing both the ills of the body, and the languor of the spirits."

"I am sure of it," Mary agrees.

"After to-morrow," Philip continues, "we can be often in each other's company, and we may take daily rambles upon the mountain, till you are quite well."

This is a delightful prospect. Oh, Mary is *so* sorry that she even suffered herself to doubt, for a single moment, the pure integrity of her lover! She thinks now that to-morrow will be a happy day, after all. And she thinks there are many, many happy days before her. Every moment her hitherto desponding spirits rise higher and higher, till she is getting actually joyous and happy again.

Conversing pleasantly they reach the White Rocks; and stand upon the great wild terrace.

"How dark the settlement looks," Mary remarks, as she gazes out upon the wide expanse.

"That," explains Philip, "is because the sun is low in the west. We are looking westward, and therefore see only the shady side of all the trees and hills. The other side is bright enough with the glow of the waning sun. Take the glass, and see if you can make out anything."

Mary takes the telescope, raises it to her eye, and through its lenses scans the evening landscape.

"I see houses, and barns, and gardens, and highways," she remarks. "I see the church near Weston, and I see my old home. It looks very lonely. I can see the mountain road very distinctly, from near Weston, till it hides itself under the mountain. Let me see if any one is traveling on it. Yes, I see several persons. They are coming this way—and so slowly, that they seem to be crawling. You look, Philip, if you can make out who they are." And Mary gives the glass to her lover.

He raises it to his eye, and brings it to bear on the extended road.

"Where are they?" he asks. "What part of the road?"

"About a mile from the mountain."

"Oh, yes; I see them now. I cannot make out who they are. They may be travelers going eastward. Well they will scarcely cross the mountain to-night."

"No, nor in half-a-dozen nights," Mary rejoins. And the travelers are soon forgotten.

Ah, Philip! did you but know who they are!—and did you but guess their errand!

"Mary," says Philip, "you had better sit down: you must be tired after your walk up the mountain. There,—" pointing to the very rock on which Mary once sat when Molly Pry was telling her fortune—"is a good seat."

"I am not much tired," Mary replies, as she avails herself of the seat; "but I may be before I reach home, and I will rest in advance."

"What a lovely evening it is," observes Philip, who remains standing.

"Yes," Mary rejoins, looking toward the declining sun; "but—"

"What?" asks Philip, perceiving that her eyes are wandering over the sky, as if in search of something.

"I miss some beautiful shining clouds, which I saw when Tilly and I were leaving the lawn. They were so lovely that I feel almost sad without them now. After all, a perfectly clear sky is not the most attractive."

"The clouds generally disperse near sunset," Philip observes, "unless a rain is brewing."

"But they were so light and thin, they could have contained no rain."

"That is the reason they are gone. The sun will set clear this evening, which augurs fair weather for to-morrow. To-morrow will, no doubt, be a pleasant and beautiful day; probably more so than to-day has been. Well, I am sure it should be, of all days in the year:—our wedding day, you know."

"Yes," is Mary's brief rejoinder.

"Wont some folks be surprised?" he suggests.

"I suppose they will," Mary replies.

"Just to think—not a soul besides ourselves knows or suspects it, except—except—the minister; I presume I had best call on him this evening and engage his services."

Except! Ah, Philip, you came near saying—"except Bill, and the other boys at the cave, you know."

Mary is silent and thoughtful, with just half an inclination to blush.

"You will be perfectly happy, wont you, Mary?" Philip asks.

"Yes,—oh, yes."

They converse for half-an-hour; and strangely enough, Mary appears to be growing morose again. Philip does nearly all the talking, and Mary replies in monosyllables. At length the conversation lags, and Philip stands near her watching the now fast-declining sun. Mary sits in silence—her eyes cast upon the ground, and the old shade of sadness fast returning to her face. Why, how foolish! Notwithstanding her determination to the contrary but an hour ago, she has again allowed her mind to revert to the strange words of delirium which she heard Philip utter little more than a month ago; and the old distrust is rapidly taking possession of her. What can be the reason? Ah, she has recalled the words of old Molly, the fortune-teller. She has not thought of them before for a long time; but since her taking a seat on the same stone which she occupied then, the words of the old beldam have recurred vividly to her mind.

At length, Philip turns to remark that the sun is getting low, and that it is time to proceed down the mountain; and he actually starts as he perceives the change that has passed over her face. He is about to speak of it, but Mary interrupts him.

"It was just two years ago," she remarks; and her voice sounds so strangely that Philip half believes it is that of

another; and he even glances uneasily about, to see if any one else is present.

"Two years, Mary?"

"Yes; two years since my father's death. I have no doubt he died this day two years ago.

"Oh."

"Philip," she continues, in a voice so strange and unnatural that it seems to proceed rather from a spirit within her, than from herself; "you murdered him; I am sure you did; I heard you say so when you were delirious."

She speaks calmly, and does not seem to realize that she is speaking at all. A moment ago, she did not know that she was about to utter these words; a voice within seemed to speak for her, as unexpectedly to herself as to Philip Kirke.

But oh, who ever saw the face of an apparent gentleman change to that of a manifest villain so suddenly! Her words have startled his black soul, and made his false heart leap. And how, in an instant, the unmistakable *villain* beams from his countenance! And how the ruffian is heard in his voice, when he speaks!

"Fool! What do you mean?" he exclaims, almost choking with sudden rage and fear.

Fool! What an epithet from one who an hour ago spoke only soft words of love! But the whole man is changed since then. The voice is now coarse and brutal. His look and manner have undergone a revolution. His face is most changed of all. An hour ago it was eloquent with expressions of unselfish love: now it is pale with madness and fear; and, combined with the abasement of the detected criminal, is a murderous look.

Mary sees all this, and reads aright. She does not cry, or scream, or rave; but silently wishes to die, and go to her father. Then she remembers that the man who took her father's life is standing before her; that but for him her father might have been with her yet; that they might still have been happy. She remembers, too, that but for her love

of Philip, and his pretended love of her, she might still, one day, have been happy and cheerful without her father. Oh, what a hypocrite Philip Kirke has been! In the space of a second she contemplates it all. In the space of a second all the honeyed words he ever spoke to her, from the time of his false declaration of love to the present time, flash across her mind, and she cannot help thinking what a treacherous heartless wretch he must be. She does not curse him though, nor pray that some fitting torture be meted out to him. Neither does she reply to his rough words.

Now she recalls the bright May morning, just two years ago to-day, on which George Roland avowed his honest love, and was rejected. She remembers, too, that George warned her then of Philip Kirke; that he reminded her he was a stranger in the settlement, and might not be a good man; that he besought her, for her own sake, not to confide in him. She does not know what so vividly brings back that scene. George is an honest, warm-hearted, noble fellow, Mary muses; there can be little doubt of that. But then she never loved any one, with the love of woman, save Philip Kirke—and, alas! he is her father's murderer. She does not know why her heart went to him. Indeed, she thinks it quite strange that it ever did. Yet she is sure it did. She is sure she has loved him ever since they became acquainted. She wishes he was not a bad man, that she might love him still: she does not know why she wishes that. She feels very strangely, somehow. She looks toward the sun, and wonders how soon it will go down. She thinks it will not be more than four or five minutes—ten, at most. The sun *is* nearly down. The western horizon is all aglow with streaks of crimson. The landscape is much darker now than it was awhile since. The trees, which looked of a very dark green then, appear almost black now. The lower edge of the great round orb—it is quite large and red now—seems impatient to touch the glimmering horizon.

Mary starts as a rough hand suddenly clutches her arm.

It is the hand of Philip Kirke. She has never known him to be other than tender before. Now he is so fierce, and her arm feels as though an iron vice had closed upon it. His face is still pale, and has grown more like that of some fiend. His bloodless lips quiver, and his teeth grind together as he hisses in her ear:

"A curse on you! What do you mean?"

"Do not touch me!" says Mary, with awful calmness; and she makes an effort to rise.

"If you dare to move," Philip exclaims, glaring upon her with a murderous look, "*I'll strangle you!*"

"Philip Kirke! hold off your hand!" Mary exclaims, losing her unnatural calmness and springing up.

But he clutches her arm still more fiercely, and forces her to sit down.

"You fool!" he hisses from his set teeth and pale lips. "How durst you trifle with me? How durst you accuse me of—of—*Have you betrayed me?*"

"Let me go!" is Mary's reply.

"Tell me, or I'll tear you in pieces!" he exclaims; and he continues to tighten his grasp upon her tender arm till his nails cut into the flesh, and she is almost frantic with pain.

"Wicked man! beware what you do! Let me go, I say!"

Mary is pale as death, her voice is husky, and her lips are dry and parched.

"Let you go! No; I'll wring the life out of you if you talk that way! Tell me: Have you betrayed me?"

"Let me go! *I* was not in league with you in your murders and highway robberies: how could *I* betray you?"

"Woman! Idiot! How dare you talk thus?"

"How dare *you* do such deeds?"

"Ha! you taunt me! Your fate is sealed! Look upon the sun! it is just going down! *Fool! it is the last you shall ever see!*"

"Vile man! what would you do?"

"Dash you to pieces!"

"No! no! you must not—you *shall* not kill me! Let me go!" And Mary struggles frantically to free herself.

"No, I'll not let you go till I send you from me to meet death!—death at the foot of the cliff!"

"Oh, Heaven! you will not, you *can* not, be so wicked! Oh, leave me! leave the settlement while you may in safety! Do not add this sin to your soul!"

"Don't talk to me of sin! My soul is black with it! My conscience is dead! The devil lives in my heart!"

"Oh, Heaven of heavens! Have I loved such a man as this!"

"Love! Bah! A snap for such idle talk! Love! Nonsense! A proper theme for soft-brained idiots!"

"Oh, is this the man who has for weeks and months so sweetly talked to me of love?"

"Enough! The sun is sinking and the devil urges me on! Curse you! You have been a fool, and you shall pay the penalty!" And the heartless demon drags the terrified girl toward the brink.

Mary starts back in horror, and struggles like a lion in the net; but he holds her with a grasp of iron.

"Oh, merciful Heaven!" she exclaims, wildly! "Oh, Philip Kirke! if you have a spark of human nature left in you, desist! It will do you no good to commit this crime! I tell you, no one but myself knows of your bad deeds! Escape while you may, and I will never divulge the fearful secret! Go! Go! You murdered my father! do not load your soul with the crime of his daughter's murder!"

"Idle words!" he hisses. "*You shall die!*"

"Oh, Heaven!" Mary exclaims, as she realizes what a heart of flint she has appealed to. "Oh, just Heaven! is it for the murderer of my father, and my own murderer, that I have rejected the pure love of the companion of my girlhood's days. Oh, George! George! if you were here now you would save me from this murderer!"

If the murderer has hesitated before, he hesitates no longer, having heard that. Nearer and nearer to the brink of the precipice, with the savage fierceness of a wild beast, he drags the struggling girl. His face now wears a more deadly look than ever; his eyes shoot forth a hellish fire, and the froth is standing upon his lips.

"The sun is half hid, and my work not done!" he mutters, hoarsely, as he makes a fierce effort to hurl his victim over the brink. "What! not over yet? Ha! The devil is impatient! Now you go! Curse you! let go my coat! Your struggles are vain! You shall die!"

"Philip! Philip!" screams the frantic girl, still clinging madly to his garments, and gasping wildly for breath at almost every word. "Philip!—Do—not!—I—implore you!—Do not!—for your—own sake!—not mine! Oh, God! Do I love him still?—"

"Curse your tongue! Down! Down! Down!"

He hurls her furiously from him, and, clinging to detached fragments of his garments, she sinks upon the verge of the cliff, and loses her balance.

Still she has not descended. With frantic energy—the energy of despair—she clings to some jutting corners of rock, and is suspended over the fearful descent.

"Not yet?" yells the murderer. "Not gone yet?"

"Save me! Save me!" screams the wretched girl. "There is yet time to avert this crime from your soul!"

Now the sun hides behind the far-off hills of the west, and the mountains seem to grow many shades darker in a twinkling, as the enraged demon seizes a detached stone, rushes to the edge of the precipice, and crushes her hands against the hard rock.

"God have mercy!" she exclaims; and, with a piercing scream that almost startles the wild rocks themselves, Mary relaxes the grasp her mangled hands can no longer retain, and—hark! a dull sound ascends from far below—she lies a shapeless, lifeless mass at the base of the cliff.

"The deed is done!"

Philip Kirke stands a moment, trembling from head to foot, listening as though expecting some sound yet to ascend from his mangled victim. All is still, though. He heard the dull crash when the body reached the bed of rocks far below; he has heard nothing since, save, indeed, the voice of an owl that has witnessed the dark deed from its place in the thicket.

But, hark! Footsteps! A withered old woman rushes from the bushes, and swinging her arms wildly above her head, cries out:

"Ha! Did I not predict it? Too late! Too late! Too late for succor, but not too late for vengeance!"

Immediately three strong men emerge from the bushes, and stand upon the rock. The murderer sees them. They are George Roland, Ned Stanton, and an officer of the law.

With a mad curse, he leaps away. They are aware of his last horrible crime, and, leaving the withered old woman (Molly Pry) standing at the edge of the bushes, laughing, screaming and gesticulating like a lunatic, they pursue! Swift as a deer he flies along the verge of the precipice, till he reaches the crevice in which the rough stairway descends. The avengers are almost upon him: they have come swiftly too. He bounds from the plateau, and springing, like a wild goat, from rock to rock, soon reaches the base of the height. He has distanced them in the descent. Away he goes among the bushes like the wind. He looks back but once, and sees something lying at the base of the White Rocks that makes him scream like a madman. He makes a circuit round the end of the ledge, and soon reaches the path. His hat is gone; his coat is torn to shreds, and, like his disheveled hair, the pendent fragments stream behind; the perspiration is rushing from every pore of his body; his eyes seem starting from his head; the white foam is still upon his lips: and thus, hotly pursued by the avengers, the murderer flees down the mountain.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE FLIGHT.

THE chase was a fearful one. Philip Kirke fled on the wings of fear, and his pursuers were urged on by the wildest feelings of vengeance. Away he went, like a wild deer, not deigning to follow the course of the path where it wound about ledges of rock or steep declivities, but rushing over all obstacles, bounding down almost perpendicular descents of a dozen feet, and clearing at a leap clumps of tangled bushes, trunks of fallen trees, or projecting rocks.

No less reckless of danger, his pursuers rushed after him. The strength and speed of the horse seemed to have been suddenly bestowed upon them; and in their impetuous descent, great stones were here and there dislodged from where they had lain for years, and came rolling and tumbling after them for fifty or a hundred paces.

The dusk of night was fast thickening when all reached the base of the mountain. The murderer was not one hundred paces in advance of his pursuers when they reached the public road. On one occasion he fell headlong upon the dusty road, did not rise for several seconds, and his capture seemed sure. But when they had begun to think he was hurt, he sprang up, and with accelerated speed flew on. He soon arrived opposite Ira Tate's house, and — confusion! — he quickly loosed Ned Stanton's horse, which stood at the gate, mounted, and rode away like the wind.

"A curse on that horse of mine!" exclaimed Ned. "May he drop dead in his tracks!"

The animal did not drop dead in his tracks though, and in a few moments more he had borne the murderer from view.

"Come!" exclaimed George Roland, "hasten to Ira's, and there let us get horses and pursue!"

"And we must tell this terrible news!" exclaimed the warm-hearted Mr. Jones. "We must tell it without time to first get 'em ready for it! Oh, it 's too horrible!"

Reaching the gate, they threw it open, and ran hastily up the path.

"What on earth is the matter?" asked Tilly; she, Ira and Aunt Eliza meeting them at the door.

"Ira! Ira!" exclaimed Ned, breathlessly. "Horses! Your best horses! Quick! That fellow, Kirke, is a devil! He is a robber! He is a murderer! He has murdered Mary White!"

"What!" exclaimed all three, doubting that they had heard aright.

"Kirke! Phil Kirke! Did you not see him mount my horse and escape? He has murdered Mary!—thrown her from the White Rocks! Go with us to your stable! Quick! We must take him!"

Tilly screamed frantically; but Aunt Eliza, feeling that no sort of justice could be done the occasion in that line, remained calm.

"Come, Ira!" said George, arousing him from a state of lethargy; "come with us to the stable, and give us horses! Mr. Jones, stay here till we bring the horses, and tell Miss Eliza a word more."

With this George and Ned hastened to the stable, accompanied by Ira, who had, at last, got himself to realize the circumstances.

"Oh, Mary! Oh, Mary!" he exclaimed, frantically, as they hurried toward the stable. "Oh, Mary! Pretty Mary! Good, sweet Mary! Our pet! Our darling girl! Murdered! murdered! murdered!"

Without taking time to unlatch the stable door, the strong old man burst it open, tearing the heavy wooden latch, as though it had been a corn-stalk.

"There they are!" he said; "the horses—the bridles—the saddles! Take them quick! You must catch him! These three horses is the best. Saddle them two, and I'll attend to this! Oh, Mary! Our poor Mary! Where is she, boys?"

"You had better take a neighbor or two, and go up to the White Rocks," said Ned. "The poor girl is lying at the bottom of the tallest part of the cliff. Poor Mary!—she never breathed after she fell!"

In less than a minute, the three horses were led from the stable, saddled and bridled. Mr. Jones, who had by this time fully explained all he knew of the tragedy to Aunt Eliza, joined Ned and George at once. The three quickly mounted, bade adieu to the disconsolate family, and rode toward Weston at a pace that made the road tremble.

It was dark when they reached the cross-roads, a mile from the village; and there they drew up for consultation.

"The question is, which way has he gone?" said Mr. Jones.

"Let us get off, and examine the horse's tracks," suggested Ned.

Just then the step of a horse was heard approaching on the left-hand road. When it drew near, Ned recognized the animal as his own, but there was no Philip Kirke in the saddle. Since being relinquished by its rider, the horse had obviously been pacing up and down the road ill at ease.

"He has been thrown off!" said Mr. Jones. "Probably he is lying along the road, not far off."

"No," replied George, "I see through his artifice: he has turned the horse loose upon this road to make us believe he went in the direction of Morgantown; while he has turned to the right, and, on foot, hurried away to the robbers' den—of which he little imagines I know anything. There we may find him at any time within the next twenty-four hours, I am perfectly sure."

"Then suppose we go to Weston, and give the signal for all to turn out."

We had better go at once to Weston, but as for firing the

reason, I do not think it would be judicious. He would hear it, and it might lead him to suspect that we had discovered his connection with the robbers, that we were aware of their location, and that we were collecting a force to dislodge them. Then he would not remain there, of course. We had better proceed quietly, and he will take it for granted that we are searching for him toward the south. Let us go to Weston at once, and from there quietly send word to all the boys to assemble with their arms, that we may be on the robbers at daylight in the morning. To go to their den at once, and attempt to capture them in the darkness, would insure the escape of some of the rascals—Kirke as likely as any one else."

The others concurred in this, and they rode to Weston: where, within an hour, a hundred armed men were assembled, ready to follow George Roland to the rendezvous of the robbers.

It would be useless to attempt to describe the consternation and horror of the citizens, on being informed of what Philip Kirke had done; and their unutterable amazement at learning of his complicity with the robbers. We will pass over that. In due time, however, indignation got the better of astonishment, and all were impatient to deal out summary vengeance upon the robbers, and especially their leader, the dastardly, treacherous Kirke.

Tony's chagrin, at the thought of having unwittingly harbored the robber and murderer for several years, approached the ludicrous; for, after calling himself all the stupid fools he could think of, and declaring upon oath that if he had had the sense of a four-week-old calf he might have seen guilt in the villain's looks, he walked into the bar-room, seized the bottle containing the liquor Philip had usually drank, brought it out before the crowd, in a somewhat formal manner, and dashed it to atoms upon the street—creating quite an odor in the vicinity, (the bottle being nearly full at the time,) and

causing Ned Stanton to remark that it was a deplorable waste of good things, however justifiable.

The full extent of George Roland's discoveries of the afternoon was not, for prudential reasons, promulgated. It was generally understood—Ned Stanton and Mr. Jones having been admonished not to divulge what they knew—that George had merely obtained a clue by which he felt confident he could lead his company to their den, which was located in Greene county; that Philip Kirke was one of them, and that he had doubtless been taken across the river in a boat. This understanding of things, in case a spy should be lurking in the vicinity, where he could hear the conversation, would serve to mislead him most effectually.

Philip's effects, which of course still remained at Tony's, were searched by the constable, and a considerable sum of money found. Some thought it not improbable that he would return stealthily in the course of the night, and attempt to recover his money: and accordingly a careful watch was kept upon all the dark alleys and obscure corners of the village. John Duffey, and a young farmer—one Wilson, whom we have mentioned before—were sitting together at one time near midnight, in a dark lane that led northward from the village, performing the duty of watchmen, when they heard a rustling of some bushes or weeds in a lot behind them. They were conversing in a whisper at the time, but immediately ceased; and the next moment a man scaled the fence, with a quick and dexterous motion, and stepped upon the ground beside them. With the strength and impetuosity of a panther, Duffey sprang upon him, clutched his throat, and brought him to the earth. The other hastened to his assistance; but so firmly did John maintain his grasp, and so thoroughly effect a temporary cessation of respiration on the part of the intruder, that he needed no help.

"Run to Tony's," he said to his companion, "and bring some of the boys out, and a rope to tie this rascal! Oho, Kirkey! The game is up with you!"

Wilson did as directed, and in a minute or two others had come to the spot, and the captive was bound, hand and foot. John then relaxed his grasp on the neck, and it was some minutes before the prisoner showed any signs of returning vitality. When he did, though, he recovered rapidly; and, being raised to his feet, he found himself able to stand—with the kindly assistance of a man at each elbow. He was then carried to Tony's bar-room, and accommodated with a seat on a whisky-barrel.

It was not Philip Kirke; but George Roland at once recognized him as one of the robbers whom he had seen at the cave that afternoon. As soon as his understanding had properly returned, and he was able to swear freely, he was informed that his "time" had "about come."

"I s'pose it has," he returned, with a savage oath; "but there 's a feller hur, if he 's not a coward, an' 'll give me jist a quarter of a show at a fight—I do n't care if he gives me jist the use o' one hand—I 'll tear his throat, an' heart, an' liver out, in one minute!"

"That 's myself, I presume," said Duffey.

"It 's a feller whose name is Roland," said the captive, who, by the way, was no other than Buster.

"What do you know of me?" asked George.

"You killed my brother."

"Ha! It was your brother who was shot here last fall?"

"Yes, it was! An' if—"

"I thought I saw a resemblance," interrupted George. "But who told you I killed him?"

"I heered it," was the stubborn reply.

"But who told you?"

"I heered it," he repeated.

"Yes, you heard it from Philip Kirke, your gentlemanly master. He thought by telling you that to get you to murder me. Oh, I know more than you think," said George, as Buster started. "Do you believe what he told you?"

"In course I do."

"Well, my beauty, you 're mistaken. Not that I would n't as lief have shot him as not—and you, too—; but, you see, your treacherous captain, as you call him, Philip Kirke, would give no one else a chance, and shot your brother himself."

"What? It 's a lie!"

"Well, your time is short, and I suppose you ought to be allowed a little privilege; so, for the present, you may use your impertinent tongue as you like. But you may rest assured that Philip Kirke shot the robber whom you call your brother."

"Yes, indeedy, old cooney," put in another, "that 's a fact. Any of the boys here will tell you so."

"Why would *he* shoot him?" queried Buster.

"For the best reason in the world—to prevent him from divulging what he knew (which he was about to do), and exposing his treachery. We did not see through it at the time, but we do now."

"If I thought that was so," Buster broke forth, "I 'd—I 'd—"

He did not say what he would do. What *could* he do, situated as he was?

"It is true," said John Duffey. "Now tell us one thing, you villain, or I 'll blow your brains out, right on the spot. Is there any one else prowling around beside yourself? Out with it, or you fall dead this minute!" And John held a pistol close to the eye of Buster.

"No! no! no!" he exclaimed. "Indeed there ain't!"

"Now, if you are lying, and we find you out, which we will—"

"No! no! I ain't lyin'! I swear I ain't! If I am, may I be—"

—In fact, served like they frequently serve a stream of water near a mill, you know. He was evidently telling the truth.

"So, Phil Kirke sent you to watch, eh?"

Buster hesitated.

"I see you are determined to be stubborn, and there is no use having any further bother with you. So, if you have any choice as to whether you would prefer being shot through the head, or body, why—" and John cocked his pistol again.

"Oh, don't!" exclaimed Buster. "If you don't kill me, I'll tell you!"

"Let's hear it, then. Did Kirke send you?"

"Yes."

"Does he expect you to return?"

"No, not till mornin'—'less I have news for him."

"What news did he expect?"

"He said if you fellers started that way to come and tell him."

"What way?"

Buster was silent again.

"Never mind, John," observed George Roland, "I know enough of their location."

"Very well," responded John. Then turning to Buster, he said: "We don't know whether to let you live till morning, or not."

"I'm in favor of blowing his brains out, and having no further trouble with him," remarked one.

"Oh, no!" ejaculated the miserable man. "Give me time! Oh, give me time!"

"But you might escape, as one of you did once."

"No, I wont. I—I—"

"Spare your breath. We know you wont so long as you are watched; and so you *shall* be till your last minute."

"I think we may use this fellow," suggested George Roland. "Look here, villain," he went on, addressing the captive, "if we spare you till to-morrow, will you assist us in rooting out your abominable den? In case we should have difficulty in finding it, will you guide us to it?"

"Yes; oh, yes!"

"Then, boys," said George, "keep a good watch on him, and should he attempt to escape, put six or eight balls

through his head. In the morning we will take him along, though I doubt whether we shall need his services. It will not be so very long till we start. We must be at the place by early dawn, and the distance is several miles."

In wakefulness and watching the company passed a couple of hours; and impatiently did they await the first glow of the East that should herald the approach of morn.

An hour after dark, on the evening of the murder, Philip Kirke, to the astonishment of his vile associates, rushed into the cave, exclaiming:

"I 've played the d—l!"

His appearance was wild, as we have before described, and the blood was starting from his mouth, nose and ears. Altogether, standing in the dim red light of a single candle that burned within, he presented such a ghastly picture that even the inmates of the cave were appalled.

"Yes, I 've done it!" he exclaimed, wildly. "I 've done it! I 've killed the girl! I 've dashed her brains out! I've hurled her from a cliff on the mountain that 's half as high as this bluff! I have! It was her own fault! She had heard me talk when I was delirious, a month ago; had heard me let every thing out; had heard me tell all about the cave here—all about you fellows—all about the murder of her father; and she had no more sense than to tell me when we were both on the cliff! What should I do then but throw her over?'

Bill was silent; whether struck with horror at the deed, or not, is a question.

"I was seen in the very act," Philip went on, "by three blood-thirsty men—Roland among them. They pursued me for some distance, but I outwitted them all! Ha! They 'll not find me here! I can stay here securely as long as I please! and I can go back and kill them all at my leisure! Ha! Ha!"

Bill could not speak, nor could the others. They began to look upon Philip as little short of mad.

"Go, one of you!" said Philip, with a start. "Go to the village and watch their movements—see what direction they go to search for me; and if they start in this direction, come and tell me. Who 'll go? Who is a good spy?"

"I 'll go," said Buster, as the others hesitated.

"Go, then, and be careful. Don't let them get hold of you. Be as quiet as a mouse, and keep your ears about you. Take any route you choose, but do not miss your way. Go! Go!"

"Must I stay all night?" Buster inquired.

"Yes; so long as you do not see or hear anything threatening, stay and watch. I will understand by your absence that all is safe. When daylight comes, hasten back. They might see you if you don't."

"I will." And Buster left the cave on his perilous expedition—to be captured, as we have already seen.

"Ah," muttered Philip, when the spy had gone, "this cave looks dark with only one candle. Those corners look as though they were gloomy openings into the hill! Light another candle, Bill—have you one?"

"Yes, plenty." And Bill sprang to obey.

"Light a good candle—one that will shed a clear light. I don't like the dark; it makes me feel queer. Hark! You did n't hear anything: did you, Bill?"

"No—only Buster climbing up the rocks outside."

"Oh, I thought it sounded within. Bill, what is that in the far corner there?"

"Only some wood piled up," returned Bill, who was in the act of lighting an additional candle.

"Is that all? I thought I saw it move. You 're sure it 's the wood?"

"Sartin. You had better take a good drink, cap'n, an' wash the blood off o' yer face."

"I will! I will! Give me the jug! Quick! And the water! I say, Joe!"

"What?

"Keep a lookout about the mouth of the cave, wont you?"

"Yes, I 'll watch." And Joe seated himself near the orifice.

"The light could n't be seen from the outside, could it?" asked Philip, uneasily.

"No; this blanket covers up the hole good enough—'sides, the wines hang about so thick that air could n't git through," was Joe's reply.

"Right! Right! I 'm glad of it! Bill!"

"What is it, cap'n?" responded Bill, as he gave Philip the stone jug and tin-cup.

"There 's no danger of Buster's getting caught, is there?"

No," returned Bill. "I reckon he 's too sharp for that. If any feller could 'tend to that job, an' not git ketched, it 's him!"

"I thought so," said Philip. "Oh, I think it 's all safe. Now for a drink. Sam, you are not going out?"

"No, cap'n."

"Do n't. I want you to stay in to-night. Stay back there in the further part of the cave, and keep watch. I do n't suppose any one can get in that way, but it 's not sure. I 've heard of people crawling out of the ground, and they might do it to-night. It looks so dark back there."

"Nobuddy kin come through the rocks, cap'n. Still, I 'll watch."

"Well, I 'm a little over-cautious, perhaps."

Philip now took a copious draught of the strong whisky; after which (Bill having brought the water) he partially washed the blood and dust from his face. He drank repeatedly during the next hour, but the liquor merely stupefied his nerves; it did not drive away the inward torment engendered by his last fearful crime. For several hours he continued to glance uneasily about him, frequently asking his companions if they heard any strange noise, as of some one groaning; whether they did not hear some one breathing with difficulty near at hand; and whether they did not hear

stealthy footsteps in the cave. Once he asked whether a strange-looking man, wrapped in a white sheet, had not passed behind him, or was not standing behind him then, looking over his shoulder? He often looked to the right and to the left, but never once did he dare to turn his head and glance behind. He had not done so since leaving the White Rocks. He had looked back once then, and, oh, what a sight he had seen!

At length he arose nervously from the stool on which he sat, and took a seat on another, with his back against the wall. This was evidently to get rid of some imaginary monster that seemed all the time standing at his back. Still he was not easy, for now he imagined that some horrid thing, like a reptile, was about to crawl down the damp wall and entwine itself about his neck.

Near midnight he fell into a doze, but before many minutes sprang up with a scream. He had only been dreaming. He had fancied that Buster had been taken; that his captors had carried him to the White Rocks and dashed him over; that *he* had witnessed all, but had not himself been seen.

For awhile he sat trembling in every limb, while great beads of unnatural perspiration started from his brow. He arose and took another hearty draught of liquor—drinking actually half a pint—then threw himself down upon a bed of loose straw, and at last fell into a deep sleep.

Bill and his companions also lay down, and were soon sleeping soundly; and quiet reigned at the ROBBERS' DEN.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

RETRIBUTION.

THE sun had not yet risen above the mountain, but broad beams of light, shooting up toward the zenith from behind the great hills, told that he was not far off; the stars had nearly all paled away, and only a few of the brightest were yet dimly visible, when George Roland led his company of armed men to the verge of the bluff overlooking the river. Buster, who had involuntarily accompanied the party, was, to say the least of it, astonished that George, without his assistance, had conducted the party, by the most direct route, to this interesting locality. He could not help wondering, and could scarce forbear inquiring, how and when he had found them out. True it was, though, that George had, by some means, discovered not only the location of their rendezvous, but also its nature, and even its number of occupants.

"Now boys," said George, within the hearing of Buster, who was carefully guarded, "the entrance to the cave in which the ruffians dwell, is right at yonder shelving rock against the bluff. The vines hang so thickly there that you might walk to and fro on the shelf for a day or two without discovering the opening leading to the cavern within. I wish to place you all, or as many of you as convenient, in positions from which you can pick them off as fast as they come out, if they will not surrender. Unless I am much mistaken, there are but four of them, including the arch-demon himself, Philip Kirke. Am I not right?" he asked, turning to Buster.

"Yes, it 's a fac'," Buster returned.

"If we find you in a lie in the slightest particular, we 'll tie you to a tree and roast you to death by inches!"

"I 'm a tellin' the truth; I swear I am!"

"Very well. Now, boys, they are armed, of course, and will probably make a desperate fight—I say, you, how many pistols have they in there?"

"Only twenty," Buster replied, as though to palliate his own transgressions as one of the outlaws, by making the number of weapons seem small.

"Any rifles?"

"No, not any. A few knives, though—a dozen or so."

"Their knives will not serve them," said George. "Now, as I was going to say, they will no doubt fight desperately; but I do not want one of you to risk his life. To set our lives against the lives of such wretches as these, when we can take them without, would be foolish in the extreme. Therefore, take your positions so that you are covered by rocks, or concealed by bushes or vines; and do not give any of them a chance to draw a bead on you. They are no doubt asleep now, but we could not enter without awaking them; for the entrance is so small, that only one man can get in at a time, and that by crawling on all fours. Now let us move down with as little noise as possible, and, when we are all ready, I will awake the sleepers so suddenly that they will be astonished. Bring that fellow with you, well-guarded, as we may have occasion to use him."

"You need n't be afeard o' me runnin' away," put in Buster.

"We 're not," replied one of his guards; "you 'll be too well watched for that."

The party now descended the bluff, and as many as could took positions within fair range of the shelf, all half hidden by vines, bushes, or rocks. Then the path, which wound its way down to the little harbor, was discovered, and a number descended and found the robbers' boat. Several remained to guard it, in case the villains should make a sally and attempt to gain it. Although some noise had necessarily been made,

the robbers were evidently still asleep; for no one had appeared at the opening. They had certainly placed the most implicit reliance on their scout, Buster.

"They are all asleep," said George, "and I am going to wake them in a hurry. When I have done so, I will get out of the way of their fire, and take a position near."

George now clambered down till he stood upon the shelf; then he stopped and listened. All was quiet. He could hear nothing but the beating of his own heart; which, it must be confessed, was rather livelier than was positively requisite to sustain life. Moving the vines gently aside in several places, he soon discovered the mouth of the cave, which was still blockaded by the pendent blanket. He could barely reach the blanket, and, gathering a portion of it in his grasp, he tore it down with a savage jerk, and immediately fired a pistol against the rocks surrounding the orifice. Simultaneously, all the inmates sprang to their feet, and a half-suppressed voice was heard to exclaim:

"We 're discovered!"

"Robbers! Outlaws! Murderers!" George called out; "Surrender!"

He had but uttered the words, when the report of a pistol was heard within, and a bullet came whistling past his ear. He sprang aside, congratulating himself on his narrow escape; and for a few moments stood and listened. He could hear confused voices within, but could not distinguish the words.

"Are you going to surrender?" he called out, keeping carefully out of range.

"Who are you?" asked a gruff voice.

"I know who he is," said another voice, which, although somewhat changed in tone, George recognized as that of Philip Kirke; and the report of a second pistol rang out, and another bullet came from the cave.

"That is a useless waste of powder," said George, addres-

ing those within. "An officer of the law is here to arrest you, and there are a hundred armed men here ready to assist him.'

"Beware," came from within—it was Philip Kirke's voice—"we, too, are a hundred strong, and you cannot take us."

"Kirke," returned George, "that wont do. I know how many men you have there—just three, besides yourself. You might have been five had you not sent out a scout last night whom we captured."

Bang! went another pistol; and another bullet passed harmlessly by.

"Come! are you going to surrender?—or shall we take measures to compel you?" asked George.

"What 'll be done with us if we do?" asked a voice which had not been heard before.

"Hush!" cried Philip. "Don't talk of surrendering! Surrender to that Roland? Never!"

George answered the question nevertheless, and very frankly.

"You will be hung, every one of you," he said, "and especially you, Philip Kirke, for the fearful crime you committed last evening—to say nothing of the murder of Henry White."

No reply came from within, and George was about to call to them again to surrender, when a hand was suddenly thrust out from among the vines, grasping a pistol, which was quickly leveled toward the spot where he stood. He dropped upon the shelf to avoid it, and as he did so it was discharged; but without effect. George now saw the propriety of changing his position, which he did by climbing a few feet up the bluff, and placing himself directly over the entrance, where it would be impossible for any one within to bring a pistol to bear upon him.

"Are you going to surrender?" he asked.

A volley of oaths, such as he had never before heard Philip Kirke utter, now came from that maddened villain. He called down upon the head of George all the blasting, withering imprecations, that fiendish hate could suggest.

"Only let me come out and fight *you* fairly,—or even with half a chance,—in any way you may name," he said, at length, addressing George, "and after that I will surrender."

"That is idle talk, Philip Kirke," George replied. "There was a time when I might have been so foolish as to stake my life against yours,—ay, and willingly,—but I did not know you then; I thought you were at least a man; now I find you are no better than a brute. Do you think I do not value my life higher than that of one who is thrice a murderer?"

"Then—curse you!—I'll kill you yet, before this fight is over. You cannot take us here. Only one man can enter this cave at a time, and any one who tries it will be a dead man before he gets half way in. What do you think of that?"

"I think you must either come out, or stay in there and starve to death," returned George.

"Starve! Ha! Ha! We have provisions enough in here to last us a year!"

"Provisions are of little use without water," suggested George, "and that you cannot have in any great quantity."

There was no response to this, and it was evident that the truth of it was sorely felt.

"You need not think, however," George resumed, "that we are going to wait here till even thirst forces you out. You must come out of there before the day is half over, or suffocate."

"Suffocate?"

"Yes; we'll smoke you out."

"Try it, and be d—" somethinged; George didn't understand what.

Parties were now dispatched for axes with which to cut wood and brush, with a view to kindling a fire on the shelf in front of the cave, while others proceeded to Weston for brimstone—the latter to be thrown upon the fire when it should be started, in order that its fumes might enter the cave; as they certainly would, for the little breeze that was stirring, struck fairly against the bluff.

The sun was now up, the sky was clear, and the morning was one of the most beautiful and pleasant of the season. The river flowed smoothly and quietly by, scarcely feeling the gentle breeze that played upon its surface. As on the beautiful May day that Henry White lay suffering in that cave, the birds were singing their morning songs as happily as though no danger or suffering were near.

As soon as the first ax arrived, George took it and proceeded to cut away the vines which grew out from the bluff and overhung the mouth of the cave. He soon severed them all at the roots, and they fell down in a heap, and tumbled from the shelf, leaving the opening entirely exposed, and letting more daylight into that vile den than had ever before penetrated it. Several shots were fired from the mouth of the cave during the operation, but in vain.

The robbers were now evidently alarmed at the threatening state of things, for they were heard in most earnest conversation within, and the word "water" was uttered in such a tone as to convince George that they were but poorly supplied with the article.

"Now," George called out, "we are prepared to light a fire in front of your cave and smoke you out; shall we do it, or will you come?"

There was no reply.

"What do you say?" George asked.

Again the robbers were heard in earnest conversation within.

"Answer at once," said George, "or the fire shall be lighted. We have already gathered large quantities of combustible matter, to say nothing of a few dozen pounds of brimstone, and —"

"Give us a little time," came from within.

"I will give you five minutes," said George. "Will you answer at the end of that time?"

"Yes."

"Boys," said George, "has any one of you a watch?- -for *I* hav n't."

Not one in the crowd had a watch.

"Kirke has one; he'll lend it to us for the purpose, I should think," remarked one, who was rather inclined to be witty.

Another of the party, however, gave him his quietus by saying:

"Certainly he will. Suppose *you* go in after it."

As the witty gentleman could not think of acceding to this proposal, it was suggested that the allotted five minutes should be measured by counting a certain number—say five hundred. Some argued that four hundred would be sufficient, while others, more liberal, opined that six hundred would be about the figure. And thus, before they were aware of it, a little discussion ensued, occupying fully five minutes; and after all it was concluded that one of the boys should count five hundred deliberately, and that when done, if the villains were not ready to surrender, the fire should be kindled. The combustibles were piled over the entrance, ready to be tumbled down upon the shelf and ignited as soon as it should be apparent that such measure must be resorted to.

The young man who did the counting was not one inclined to mercy's side, and did not advocate the granting-much-time principle; and it has been stated that he not only counted much faster than his instructions warranted, but that he was even known to "skip" as many as ten in every hundred. At last he had the satisfaction of pronouncing the "FIVE HUNDRED," which he did with a look of triumph, and a flourish of the voice which a political speaker might imitate with some advantage. When he had finished, George called out:

"The time is up; what are you going to do?"

The reply came from Bill—Kirke, no doubt, feeling too bitterly to negotiate with George Roland, his rival, enemy, and evil genius.

"We 're a goin' to give ourselves up if you say you wont shoot us all down as we come out."

"Come out, then," said George. "We will not shoot you right away. Mind you though, no tricks! Bring no arms with you. The moment we see that you mean to be false to your word, you shall be shot down."

The robbers did not intend to surrender. They had weighed the matter carefully, and they thought that there remained just one faint gleam of hope for them, and that was their chance of reaching the boat by brandishing their arms and rushing suddenly down the path when all should stand upon the shelf. It was therefore arranged that they should follow each other from the cave in quick succession,—their arms concealed about them,—draw their pistols and leap hastily down the path. They expected to be fired on, but surely in the hurry and confusion one or two of them might escape. The hope was a very slight one,—just like the straw at which the drowning man clutches,—for even should they, or several of them, succeed in reaching the harbor, they might find the boat guarded (as indeed it was), and still be at the mercy of the besiegers. Yet it was a hope,—a last and only hope,—and they clung to it accordingly.

"We 're a comin' now. You wont fire on us?" Bill called out in a tremulous tone.

"We 'll keep our word if you keep yours," George replied.

Instantly Bill sprang out, and stood upon the shelf, then Joe followed, then Sam, and Philip was on the point of following, when Bill, rather prematurely, drew a pistol and cried out:

"Come! Come on! Now fur it!" And with one accord the three sprang toward the path.

There was a succession of sharp reports, a scream or two, an oath, a groan; and the three robbers fell. Bill tumbled over the bluff, with a broken thigh and a wound in the side; Sam fell forward, just as he reached the head of the path, and after tumbling a few paces down the rustic stairway, lodged

against a rock; while Joe sank prostrate upon the shelf, and never moved again. Philip, however, had not come out: he still remained in the cave.

Bill fell from rock to rock till within a dozen feet of the river, where he lodged among some thick bushes that grew from among the rocks. Some of the boys climbed carefully down, and found him dying. He was unconscious, and he never spoke again—never revealed his many dark crimes. Sam was taken up, mortally wounded. He was conscious, but barely able to speak. He gave his name and the number of his companions, stating that no one now remained within the cave but Philip Kirke. He was carried to the top of the bluff, and laid upon a bed of moss; and there within the ensuing half-hour his life blood oozed out. It was apparent to all that Joe was dead, and for the time his body was allowed to lie where it fell.

Buster looked very solemn, and on being asked what he thought of it all, felt constrained to admit that it was "nothin' more than right."

"Are you yet convinced that Philip Kirke killed your brother?" was asked.

"Yes, I are," he replied, thoughtfully.

"Are you not sorry you ever mixed in with such a villain?"

"Yes, but it's too late now. I ort to a been that afore I done it. But I've allus been bad myself. I never had nobody to tell me nothin' about not doin' no bad things, and as might be spected, I turned out bad."

It was now clear that Philip remained alone in the cave, and it was equally certain that he would not suffer himself to be taken alive. George Roland was determined to cut the matter short, and he called out to the wretched man:

"Philip Kirke, we see that you meant treachery. Your wicked companions have met the fate they deserved, and only you are left. We do not intend to waste much time with you. Will you come out and surrender, or not?"

"Surrender to you! Curse you, no! Not if it were to save my life and soul! Surrender to *you!* Oh, I could go to the lower regions content if I were only first allowed the privilege of blowing your heart out!"

"That privilege we could not think of granting you, although there is no doubt it would be very pleasant to yourself. Once more: *will you come out?*"

"NEVER!"

"Then prepare to die. The fire will soon be lighted, and the fumes of brimstone will soon fill the cave and choke you."

"Well," put in an unsympathizing youth, "he may as well commence to get used to the smell, for I reckon he 'll get nothing else for his meals before long."

"Bring on the wood and straw," said George.

"Ah, cowards!" Philip hissed forth, in a tone of such bitter hatred, that the words seemed to grate against the rocks as they came from the opening.

"Cowards!" returned George. "Was the man who waylaid and murdered an old man a coward? Was the man who incited his vile confederates to waylay and murder several unoffending men with whom he daily associated a coward? Was the man who threw a poor, weak, defenseless girl from the tallest cliff on the mountain, and dashed her to pieces—was *he* a coward? Bah! If such a man is brave, let me be a coward!"

No reply came from the cave. The dry wood and straw were tumbled from over the entrance, and began to pile up on the shelf, and preparations were made for setting it on fire.

"Philip Kirke," said George, "all is ready. We have asked you for the last time to come out."

There was no reply.

"Now the fire, boys."

Suddenly the sharp report of a pistol was heard within, something was heard to fall, and when the echoes died away all was still.

"He has shot himself!" suggested one.

George was about to descend to the shelf, when, to the surprise of all, Buster came springing down the bluff; and before any one could divine his purpose, he had reached George and intercepted him.

"Don't go down!" he whispered, as George turned upon him, half in anger, half in wonder. "Don't go down! It's a trick! He wants to make you think he has killed himself, and the minute you git in sight of him he is ready to shoot you dead!"

Buster was right. Philip was, at that very moment, standing near the entrance of the cave, with a loaded pistol in his hand, waiting for George to make his appearance. His eyes gleamed with a demoniac thirst for the expected blood, and his hand shook in greedy anticipation of one more bloody deed. But he had committed his last crime.

George instantly concurred in the opinion of Buster, and signing to the others to beware, he called out:

"Philip Kirke, if you think to entrap me with such a trick as that, it is but an act of charity on my part to undeceive you as early as possible."

George spoke purposely in a taunting tone, which he felt sure could not fail to elicit a spontaneous reply from the murderer, if his conjectures should prove correct. He was right, too; for instantly a volley of bitter curses came from the cave, the sound of which indicated that he was standing quite near the opening.

George was about to proceed with the suffocating arrangement, when Buster thus addressed him, in a low tone:

"Cap'n, if you 'll let me, I 'll fotch the feller out. It ain't that I spec' any mercy fur it; but he killed my brother, an' afore he dies, I want to let him know as I know it, an' to do him a turn as 'll pay him back in part."

"But he would shoot you if you were to present yourself at the mouth of the cave."

"But I 'll pretend I 'm escapin', and I 'll holler to him to let me in."

"Yes, and like as not that will be the last we 'll see of you."

"No, you may count on me. I swear it. D'ye s'pose I 'd go in there to be suffocated, when I can die hur in the open air?"

"Well, I don't know what to say. What do you say, Ned?" said George, appealing to Ned Stanton; "is he up to a trick, or not?"

"I think not," replied Ned.

"Then, fellow, you may go," said George. "But wait: First I will explain the matter to the others, that they may not think you are running away, and shoot you. I will also have several shots fired in another direction, to make him think we are firing at you. Do you understand?"

"Yes."

George climbed cautiously about from post to post, and in a few words explained what was to be done. All were confident that Buster meant well; and George returned to his position, and told him to go.

Buster made a rush among some bushes that grew near, leaped down upon the shelf, yelled loudly, and while the reports of a dozen rifles rang out, presented himself at the mouth of the cave, and, breathlessly, called out:

"Cap'n! cap'n! It 's me! I 'm 'scaped! They 've hit me! Help me in! Quick!"

The *ruse* took. The unsuspecting murderer dropped his pistol, almost rejoiced at the prospect of having a companion to suffer death with, and extended both his hands to draw Buster in quickly, ere he should receive a fatal wound. With a sudden and unexpected movement, Buster grasped both his wrists firmly, and sprang back upon the shelf with such quickness and energy, that Philip was drawn clear out of the cave before he could at all comprehend the true state of things. He soon got a terrible inkling of it, however, and exclaimed:

"Dog! Have you betrayed me?"

"Yes," returned Buster, coolly, still holding him fast, "an all cos you killed my brother. I heerd of it."

A hurried movement was made by George and those near at hand to secure Philip, and a most desperate struggle ensued between him and Buster: the former making frantic efforts to free himself, and the latter straining every muscle to hold him till assistance should arrive. They were not long in working their way to the edge of the narrow shelf, in their struggles; and, ere any one could reach them, both tumbled over, still struggling. When they found they were falling, each relaxed his hold, and Buster, fortunately grasping a thick vine, succeeded in arresting his downward progress, and in eventually gaining a seat, *pro tempore*, on a projecting rock. Philip made a similar effort to save himself, but failed; and away he went, rolling, tumbling, and falling down the bluff, striking upon sharp rocks at short intervals in his fearful descent, and here and there actually leaving fragments of his torn flesh adhering to the sharp corners and points. Down, down, down, striking, bounding, tearing, crushing, bleeding, went the body of the wretched murderer, till it landed lifeless in the river far below. It floated out a few yards upon the surface of the water, leaving a crimson path after it; then it sunk, and was seen no more in the vicinity of the ROBBERS' DEN.

* * * * * * *

Let us now take a hasty leave of the cave in the bluff, and of the only occupant thereof who was permitted to live: namely, Buster. He was assisted from his irksome position, after Philip Kirke's fate had been ascertained, and proved quite docile, and even useful. He conducted George and many others through the cave, and pointed out, with creditable precision, the various crevices in which their treasures were concealed. He also explained many things about the cave, showing its adaptation to domestic purposes. It was almost with pride that he referred them to the neat fire-place which nature had constructed when forming the cave itself.

This was a large niche in the further wall of the cave, which, as it ascended, grew narrower, until it terminated in a small fissure which, Buster explained, took its way among the rocks till it came out upon the bluff some forty feet above, among some thick bushes. This, he stated, carried off the smoke, and "drawed" in a way that no chimney need be ashamed of. He boasted that few natural caverns possessed such facilities for dwelling in as this, although there was a rather deplorable scarcity of water within—there being no vestige of a spring. He could not help remarking that a clear, cool spring in one corner was all that was wanting to make the cave superior to any other institution of the kind anywhere on the globe.

He made a "clean breast" in relation to all crimes projected and executed by the fraternity in their days of prosperity. He was particularly precise, and even eloquent, in describing the murder of Henry White, which, he had no hesitation in saying, was a "gol-dashed shame," and that it was a consoling reflection to him that he had had nothing to do with it. At the request of George Roland, he conducted the party to the spot where Henry White had been buried, that the remains might be removed to the village churchyard.

In consideration of his improved deportment, the company concluded not to hang him, but to hand him over to the civil authorities, which they did.

And now, to be brief: He was tried in due time, only on the charge of highway robbery, plead guilty, and was sentenced to imprisonment for life, with the understanding that his sentence should be extended, in case it should ever in the future come to light that he had been directly guilty of worse crimes.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

IN MEMORIAM.

We cannot be too brief now. It is not our purpose to picture the last sad rites performed over all that was mortal of Mary White. Suffice it to say that no funeral in Fayette county was ever more largely attended, or characterized with such deep solemnity.

For some reason, the remains of the murdered girl were interred in a family burial-ground on Ira's farm. We have several times stood by the large gray stone that marks the spot, and read the inscription thereon; namely, "In Memory of Mary White, who was murdered at the White Rocks, May 12, 1810." To this is added a homely verse, which possesses only the merit of rhyming a couple of times, and which does not speak very highly of the poetic genius of the composer.

The farm on which the graveyard is situated is known as the "Hayden Farm." It lies near "Fairchance Iron Works," six miles from Uniontown, and is, in common with the White Rocks and Delany's Cave, much visited by tourists and pleasure-seekers.

It is rather the object of this chapter to introduce—and certainly not inappropriately—a poem which the tragedy at the White Rocks naturally elicited from the pen of our village Bard, and which, the reader will probably agree, is not entirely without merit. But let it speak for itself:

"LINES

"ON THE MURDER OF MARY W——,

' Who was thrown from the White Rocks by a false lover, May 12th, 1810

"BY ——

"The sun is glowing at the close of day,
Bathing the landscape with celestial fire;
The earth is decked with all the flowers of May,
And hills and dales smile in their fresh attire.

"The mountains rear their lofty heads on high—
They, too, are clad with foliage fresh and green—
As though they fain would kiss the azure sky,
And thus add grace of action to the scene.

"The evening air is pleasant, calm and still;
No sighing breeze or tender zephyr blows
Against the face of the ascending hill,
To stir the wild-vine or the mountain rose.

"Half hid among the trees, full many a cliff
Clings to the mountain side; but there is one
That rises far above the rest, as if
To catch the last rays of the setting sun.

"So high it towers, that, from its lofty crest,
Full thirty miles of rolling hills are seen,
All in the pleasant garb of spring tide dressed;
And many vales that, sleeping, lie between.

"What quiet reigns! the air how soft and mild;
The old gray rocks how silent and how grave;
How motionless the vines and bushes wild;
The trees how still, their branches do not wave.

"But hark! what piercing scream breaks on the air
From yonder cliff that rears so high its crest?
What dread, what danger, or what pain is there?
What mortal so affrighted or distressed?

"Or was it but a panther on the height,
That shrieked so like a human in dismay?
Did it but call a comrade for the night,
To go and seek some unsuspecting prey?

"Hark! 'tis repeated! 'tis a human shriek!
A maiden's voice!—it calls aloud in fear!
What danger threatens? What aid does she seek?
Or who is there in this wild place to hear?

"Do prowling wolves come swift upon her track,
Emboldened by the near approach of night?
And does she, to avert the mad attack,
Flee to the summit of the rocky height?

"Ah, no! Behold a more vindictive foe—
A murderer! she struggles in his grasp;
He fain would hurl her to the ground below;
But still she shrieks, and clings with frantic clasp.

"He heeds her not—her prayers are all in vain;
His soul is hellish fire—his heart is stone;
His rude hand thrusts her to the brink again;
She shrieks and falls, and now the deed is done.

"At such a deed, the blushing orb of day
Covers his face behind a western hill,
As if, indeed, ashamed to longer stay,
And gaze on acts so dreadful, base and ill.

"The murderer flees, his soul beset with fear;
He starts away amid the gathering night:
His deed is seen, avenging hands are near;
They swift pursue him in his hasty flight.

"They 've gone—the murderer and avengers too:
He rushes down the mountain like the wind:
On wings of vengeance, they as swift pursue,
And leave the solemn scene of death behind.

"Where yonder cliff arises, draw thou near;
In awe, remove the covering from thy head;
Be grave and thoughtful—drop a silent tear,
Thou standest in the presence of the dead.

"There lies the body, lifeless, bruised and torn;
The soul has barely winged its flight away:
The wild-vines sigh, the rude rocks laugh in scorn,
At such a helpless, useless lump of clay.

"So beautiful a single hour ago;
So full of life—the home of sense and light:
But ah, how dull, how dumb and lifeless now;
How changed in looks, how ghastly to the sight.

"Ah, maiden, what infatuating dream
Hath brought thee here to meet the murderer's wrath?
Did some impatient friend across the stream
Direct thy foot-steps up the mountain path?

"Was there a beckon from an unseen hand?
A noiseless whisper from a silent breath?—
To call thy spirit from the lower land,
And urge thy body to untimely death?

"Oh, stand aside, impenetrable vail!
That hides the land of shadows from our sight
Oh, let us see the waiting friends that hail
The maiden's spirit in its upward flight!

"Ah, could we see the liberated soul
Enter the portals of the land above,
Received by waiting parents at the goal,
And clasped in arms of everlasting love;

"Then might we turn, without a single tear,
And fix our gaze on the deserted clay:
The picture of the spirit's heavenly cheer
Would surely drive the earthly gloom away.

"Let not the tender form lie here to-night;
Let not the pale cheek catch the falling dew:
The mournful owl is screaming on the height,
As though himself were filled with sorrow too.

"The vail of night is falling thick and fast;
The glow-worm dances on the mountain side;
On stealthy wings, the bat goes flitting past;
The whippoorwill is chattering far and wide.

"May not some hungry wolf scent from afar
Those drops of blood that sprinkle the white face?
And steal up in the darkness to devour
The helpless form once full of life and grace?

"Shall flesh like this feed savage beasts of prey,
Among these lonely hills, now wrapped in gloom?
Oh, no! Come, friends, bear the cold form away,
And, with due rites, empale it in the tomb."

There is also a ballad extant, written on the same subject, by Mr. Samuel Little, an estimable gentleman of Fayette county, who was present when the mangled body of the murdered girl was taken up from the rough bed of rocks to which it had been precipitated. The ballad, which we have heard sung with excellent effect, and with which almost every person of that section of country is familiar, we think it not improper to quote:

"ON THE DEATH OF MARY W——,

"WHO WAS MURDERED AT THE WHITE ROCKS, MAY 12TH, 1810.

"Young men and young maidens, come hear a sad story;
A sorrowful deed has been done in these lands;
A sweet blooming maiden was slain by her lover,
While waiting for transports in Hymen's soft bands.

"The streams were all swollen, black clouds hid the mountains,
The vales lay enveloped in misty array,
When I climbed the damp hills and beheld with dread horror,
The spot where all mangled the poor victim lay.

"Grim rose the huge rocks and deep sunk were the caverns—
With thorns and keen briers the place was o'er grown;
Above, the dark brow of the mountain hung frowning—
In the valleys sad midnight had built her black throne.

"Sweet girl, these wild rocks! What a rude nuptial chamber!
Is it meet that a bride on the cold ground shall lie,
While the howling of wolves and the screaming of panthers
Resound in the thickets and valleys hard by?

"How long didst thou toil up this steep rugged mountain?
How weary! How fainting thy delicate frame!
But fond hope still cheered thee, the moment approaching
To crown promised pleasures that virtue may claim.

"Oh, sad was the moment when smiles and caresses
Were changed to black curses and murderous blows!
Oh, how could the lover at once be a demon!
His foul heart unblushing, how could he disclose!

"I see thee all pale, and all trembling before him;
I hear thy entreaties, thy heart-rending cries;
But, poor lonely victim, no helper is near thee—
No father, no mother, to answer thy sighs.

"The struggle begins—his fell hand is uplifted;
I see thy blood flowing—thy screams are in vain;
No more than the rocks will his heart have compassion—
No more than the rocks will it melt at thy pain.

"Those fair eyes so lately with tenderness blooming,
Now roll with wild horror and start with keen pain;
And soon, very soon, will be sealed up forever,
No sun of to-morrow will greet them again.

"At the wide-gaping wounds thy poor spirit waits fluttering,
A path all unknown it must shortly pursue;
A faint—a *last* sigh from thy bursting heart whispers,
'Poor *traitor!*—Poor *murderer!* I bid thee adieu!'

"Ye rocks that stand near her, how can ye but tremble!
Are ye with the merciless traitor combined?
Yes, ye, too, are stained with the life's ebbing crimson,
In your heartless bosoms no friend can she find.

"Ye caverns that groan while her heart-strings are breaking,
Can ye not conceal the unfortunate fair?
Or expand your dark fissures and sieze her tormentor,
And hurl his black soul to eternal despair?

"Oh where sleeps the thunder—the lightning's red vengeance?
Is no friendly Genius inciting them on?
Is Heaven no more a protector from danger?
When lovers prove murd'rers, is hope ever gone?

"Still groan ye deep caverns, still shriek ye dark valleys!
The lost one shall witness against you for aye,
That ye silent stood by 'mid the soul-rending torture,
That crowned the dark eve of this terrible day.

"'Twas piteous, fair maiden, that strangers' rude shoulders,
Through thickets should bear thee down to thy long home—
Rough pines of the mountains thy soft limbs supporting—
That no brother or sister should weep at thy tomb.

"'Twas the cold hand of strangers that placed thy death pillow,
That closed the sunk eyes, and thy winding-sheet gave;
No friend stood around thee to sing a requita;
No tear of a parent has softened thy grave.

"Ye spirits who sit round the grave of the murdered,
Each evening chant forth her unparalleled woes;
Ye cold clods that hide her, lie light on her bosom—
Once torn by rough rocks let the fair flesh repose.

"Sweet sufferer, sleep on, and may Heaven protect thee;
May angels sit watching thy innocent clay,
Till the last trumpet sounding—thy soft slumbers breaking—
Calls thee home to the realms of ineffable day!"

These lines, of course, could not be called high-sounding poetry; but they were written to be sung, and have fully accomplished their mission as a pathetic ballad.

CHAPTER XL.

CONCLUSION.

FOLLOWING close upon the events of this narrative came the war with Great Britain, known as the "War of 1812." A company of volunteers was speedily organized at Weston, and at once entered the military service. It was made up chiefly of those who had assisted in annihilating Philip Kirke's institution; and it is needless to say that George Roland was the captain. It is also needless to say that John Duffey, Ned Stanton, Will Hempstead and Tony Baily were

prominent members. Even "Noisy Dick' left his blacksmith shop in the care of an apprentice and went.

The brave Weston boys, armed with their own sure rifles, were at first sent to the frontier, where they soon gained some celebrity in their fights with the Indians. Subsequently they were recalled, and attached to a Pennsylvania regiment, with which they participated in the bloody battle of Lundy's Lane. It was a sad battle for the brave riflemen. One half their number met with either serious or fatal wounds. George Roland, their intrepid captain, was wounded several times during the engagement, but would not leave the field while he had strength to stand. Will Hempstead was killed by the side of his friend Duffey, while nobly doing his duty in the face of death. Ned Stanton—whatever his faults, a brave fellow!—was color-bearer that day, and, in the midst of a hand-to-hand conflict with the enemy, received a mortal wound; but even then, while the life-blood was trickling from his breast, he continued to strike manfully about him with a fragment of a broken musket, crushing down a foeman at every blow; and at last fell to the ground, covered with the red glory of battle, and still grasping the staff which bore the proud banner of his country, while a loud shout of VICTORY! greeted his dying ear.

His friend Dick, who had not spoken that day, was with him, and only exclaimed: "Oh, Ned! My friend, Ned! God bless you!"

Duffey and Tony Baily conducted themselves with becoming gallantry during the fierce engagement—as, indeed, did all the company—and came out of the day's strife with only slight wounds.

This was not the only battle in which the Weston boys took part; but to chronicle all their deeds of valor during the war would be to write a much larger volume than this. Their acts are duly recorded in the history of the country.

George Roland never sought military distinction. He declined all offers of promotion, and when the war was over he

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returned to his native village a captain, as he had left it; and it was with mingled pride and sadness that he brought back to Weston the remnant of his company of gallant riflemen.

He did not marry for several years after his return; but at last—it *will* come to that in such cases—he concluded no longer to repine after the lost object of his first love, and he and a bright young woman—Miss Kitty—were made one. He lived in Fayette county, a happy, thrifty farmer, to the allotted age of three score and ten.

Only one of the actors in this drama is yet alive, and that is John Duffey: all the others have passed away. The once gay, sprightly and mischievous youth is now a white-haired man of well nigh four score years. Although his step is slow and infirm, his eye dim and his ear quite dull, he still possesses some of the good humor and affability of his youthful days; and we have often been amused at quaint stories we have heard him relate of his soldier life—especially one, of his pushing an officer into an air-hole on the frozen river, for calling him a "liar," and of his refusing to help him out (no one else being near) till the said officer promised not to report him at head-quarters.

John married the idol of his heart (Miss Maggie Ross) within two weeks after his return from the army, and they lived thirty happy years together before she was called away.

Tilly Tate never married. She confidently prognosticated that, after the various shocks her heart had received, she was "not long for this world;" that, in a word, she would "die young," and follow her cousin, and—Ned; but, by taking good care of herself in damp weather, avoiding love and sleighing-parties, taking plenty of exercise in the pure air during the pleasant seasons, and carefully ignoring all physicians, she managed to reach the age of seventy-four.

One fine morning, several years after the tragedy at the White Rocks, Ira Tate, in making his way to one of the fields where he had some work to do, accidentally fell from a nine-rail fence which he was climbing, and came down with a

crash in the midst of a clump of thistles. He was not seriously hurt, but the thistles caused such stinging pain as a man of his irritable disposition is not apt to pass lightly over. He, therefore, sprang to his feet, broke four stout fence-rails by striking them fiercely across each other, killed a small pig that chanced to be trotting by, returned to the house, and was sullen and morose the whole day. Near evening, while Aunt Eliza was preparing supper, and Tilly was down at the dairy, he abruptly said:

"Liza, let's get married."

And they did.

THE END.

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